KOREAN SHORT STORIES (1)

A Usual Morning

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A Usual Morning

Chin Jae Hwan

The great leader was reading a book under a table lamp with a green shade. His daily routine had started already. He lifted his head and looked at the window that was half covered by a thin, soft white curtain. There were droplets of water on the panes. He left his seat and went outside.

Splash! Came a noise from the pond. It was a fish leaping out of the water. The early morning air was fresh.

The leader stepped down into the courtyard.

It was drizzling. The raindrops sprinkled on the yellow leaves and on the surface of the sleeping pond, disturbing the silence. The road was wet and glossy. The lamps among the trees in the garden had drops of water on them, as if they were sweating. The rain had just started; at the bottom of each tree there was still a dry spot as wide as a cushion.

The great leader watched the sky, his left hand on his waist. The sky was frowning, rain clouds scattering all over. He felt the raindrops on the palm of his right hand.

His aide, who had already come and stood beside him unobserved, quickly opened the umbrella and held it up

over the leader. But he declined it, again feeling the rain on the palm of his hand.

"Do you think there'll be much rain?" he asked his aide, who was following him under one of the outdoor lamps. The aide only looked up at the sky, unable to make a prompt reply. He could read the leader's anxiety about the crops lying heaped up in the fields. The weather was a matter of much concern for the great leader these days. The aide went away for a while and came back with a report.

"The forecast says there will be a light rain on the west coast early in the morning, but it will let up soon. The rainfall is supposed to be five mm or so."

The great leader stopped to listen.

The rain was coming on a little faster now: the water was streaming down the lamp and the pond began to stir.

"Five mm! Well, we aren't going to have much rain. There's an old saying, in autumn rain does not come in large quantity. The farming is over now, and I don't think it'll do much harm. But I'm afraid our farmers can hardly sleep at night for this rain. They feel uneasy about the crops all the while, from sowing till gathering. The same feeling parents have when their kids are playing on the riverside."

The leader, moving from one foot to the other, gazed up at the rainy sky.

"Let's go and take a quick look at the farm, Comrade. I have a couple of hours to spare, so I'll meet the farmers."

Presently the car, carrying the great leader, emerged from the gate and proceeded along the main street of the town.

The houses lining both sides of the long road kept their windows tightly shut. The tall dark buildings were in their peaceful slumber, their tops hidden in the night sky. Only the shops on the ground floors shed bright greenish lights, displaying their goods in neat array. The street lamps went past like a line of sentinels in front of the apartment blocks; they were guardians of the night's tranquility, standing firm between the trees thick with large leaves.

The silver-pale fluorescent lights illumined the street as clearly as in the day. The road under the lamps glistened, washed clean by the rain. The road markings stretched away like unrolled bolts of white calico.

And the city's main thoroughfares were as busy as in the daytime; there was a constant stream of vehicles tailing one another. Most of them were trucks, many carrying radishes. They were coming in and going out in double rows either side. The vehicles, like well-trained soldiers, were moving in good order, each washed clean and with headlights glowing.

"Drive slowly for a while, please," the leader said to the aide and opened the window. The damp, cool air came in, mingled with the noise of the engine.

The aide glanced at the image of the great leader reflected in the front mirror. At first he thought he was looking at a line of trucks in the street. Then he realised he was actually looking beyond the vehicles to a brightly-lit food store on the ground floor of an apartment house. The shop had a "Morning & Evening Counter" sign in a corner, and there were a few women customers already, who must be buying some food for side dishes. Apparently they were housewives whose husbands were going to work early in the morning.

The great leader told the driver to stop. He got out and went towards the shop, his hands clasped behind his back.

A saleswoman was weighing steamed herrings on the scale. She was in a white overall with a well-starched triangle kerchief on her head. The cooked fish were still steaming and looked oily in the light. They were nicely spiced and looked very appetizing.

The great leader greeted the women with a smile. They were taken aback initially when they recognized who it was, and then hugely delighted and excited.

"Go ahead and get your things," urged the leader in a gentle voice. "Go ahead or they will get cold."

One of them held out her aluminium pan and got her portion, blinking her eyes, overwhelmed by his gracious words.

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"So, your husband must be going out to work early, eh?"

"He is, leader."

"Where does he work?"

"At the railway, leader."

"Railway?... Then, he often works early in the morning or at night, I think?"

His words sounded deeply sympathetic.

"In that case, you visit this morning & evening counter quite often?"

"Yes. I only boil the rice at home. I always get the soup and side dishes here."

"Does that help cut down your work in the kitchen?"

"Why, yes, it cuts it down by half, leader."

The leader bent to hear her. He was rather interested in the reply.

"By half! That's excellent."

He was heartily glad to know that the morning & evening counter was helping to cut down the burden of work in the kitchen. How nice!

The great leader asked the woman where she worked and how far it was from home. She was a storekeeper at a women's garment factory downtown. It was not far off. But the leader expressed concern. He said her job as a storekeeper might sometimes detain her until late in the evening and then she might have a hard time in cooking supper at home.

"We have a rice-cookery by my workplace, leader," replied the woman briskly and cheerily. "I usually have the rice boiled there for supper." Her reply conveyed her unalloyed satisfaction with the happy life she enjoyed free from any worry.

"But the rice gets cold on your way home, doesn't it?

"I can warm it at home, leader."

"Warm it? But I fear that must cost you almost as much trouble as cooking it."

The housewife was now at a loss for words; she was so sincerely grateful for his kindly consideration that tears gathered in her eyes.

Back in the car, the great leader was pensive for a while. Then he told his aide to ring up the Chairman of the Public Service Commission.

The aide picked up the receiver. He felt strained; undoubtedly, the leader was not satisfied with the rice cookeries in the town.

While the aide was dialing, the leader observed the dark sky above the streets. A buzzing sound was heard from the receiver, the noise of the flowing current. The great leader glanced at his wrist watch. And again he cast his eyes over the houses in the street. A look of self-control flashed across his face.

"Don't ring up, Comrade," he said gently. The aide promptly hung up the receiver, and looked up at him inquiringly.

The leader looked rather mild and tender, unlike a few moments ago. It was utterly impossible for the aide to fathom his thoughts.

He had thought he knew why the great leader had wanted to call up the Chairman of the Public Service Commission; but why did he change his mind? So, as a matter of fact, the aide was not even sure why the leader had wanted to make the telephone call in the first place.

As the car left the town, the great leader watched outside through the window. He kept his face close up to the window all the way. It was still too dark outside to clearly discern anything on the roadside. But the headlights of trucks and tractors were visible, scattered all over the fields. People could be glimpsed hurrying past the moving lights. And the rice stacks in the paddy-fields would appear and disappear.

The car passed a wide expanse of plain and was now turning round a hillock. The bright headlights pierced the darkness to expose part of the field on the hillock. The field was bare, except for sheaves of maize stalks stood close together in rows. The harvesting was well under way as the great leader had expected.

The leader, who had been sitting by the window exposed to the rain and the wind, withdrew himself to lean against the back of the seat. He seemed to feel relieved.

The windscreen-wipers, which had been busily wiping the rain drops away, had been switched off. The open space lit up by the headlights was blurred by something like mist. The drizzle had almost subsided; it had become very much softer now although it was still damp.

"We'll get to Kumdae-ri in 20 minutes or so, won't we?" inquired the leader, when the car had crossed a long bridge.

"Yes, sir. About 16 km from this bridge," the aide answered, looking out at the railings of the bridge flashing by the window, and down at the wide stream.

"Sixteen km! Let's hurry up," said the great leader, looking at his watch.

He suddenly recalled the image of the young girl who was chairman of the farm in Kumdae-ri. She might be the youngest farm chairman in the country.

The great leader had first met her three years previously. He was giving an on-the-spot guidance to the agricultural workers in the province. He called a meeting of the personnel concerned. During the debate a young girl workteam head made an astonishing speech. She explained how she had been able to produce five tons of maize per hectare in hillside fields which had yielded only two tons per hectare until the year before.

The great leader was so deeply impressed that he made a point of meeting her during the recess.

"You did a good job, comrade workteam head. How did you manage to reap five tons of maize per hectare on that barren hillside?"

The girl hesitated, as if she did not consider it a success worth mentioning.

"Leader, you taught us to work assiduously as masters of the farm," she said. "And bearing your teaching in mind, we did our best to make the fields fertile, just like our own kitchen gardens, that's all, sir."

How glad he was to hear this!

"Just like your own kitchen gardens, eh?"

That year she was appointed chairman of the farm management board. The leader sent her a new maize thresher to celebrate the occasion in the spirit that parents

provide their daughters with dowries.

Recently, he had analyzed the nation's agricultural situation. He found that Kumdae-ri was performing excellently; its maize output was twice as high as the previous year. He often inquired about the farm and wanted to visit it personally. The first place the drizzle reminded him of was Kumdae-ri.

The car inclined slightly to one side on the country road, when the leader emerged from his reverie.

It was dawning. Through the window he could see a low hill, where lamps were hanging closer to each other. The leader studied the place carefully. There were dark rice stacks and dust could be seen in the light rising in grey columns. He recognized it as an open-air threshing ground. He opened the window and strained his ears. He could distinctly hear the sound of a thresher in operation.

"We're now in Kumdae-ri." The car was near the threshing ground, when the great leader proposed to get out and walk. The village road seemed to have been flattened under the heavy weight of vehicles; there were so many wheel tracks left by trucks and tractors. The road was littered with straws which had strayed off the trucks and the cakes of squeezed mud carried on the wheels from the paddy fields. You could also see the long belt-like trails of oxcart wheels.

The uncertain weather had forced the whole village to come out to bring in the rice stacks.

The leader looked admiringly round the village. The vegetable fields were all green and fresh. The water sprinklers were working well, even spraying the water as far as the edge of the road. And on a low hillock near the threshing ground, there stood a small weather station. Two weather-cocks were revolving constantly to indicate the direction of the wind. A long irrigation pipe was running across the terraced fields on the hillside behind the threshing ground. And a tiny pump station huddled cosily under a tall electric pole with two transformers on it.

The great leader nodded to himself. All these were common scenes you could see anywhere in our countryside, in this era of irrigation, electrification, mechaniza-

tion and chemicalization. However, he felt very proud of everything there, which he felt must be permeated with the sweat of the young chairman of the farm. He walked along. He saw heaps of maize-cobs under thatches on either side of the lane leading to the thrashing ground. He lifted the thatch and picked up a fat cob. It was heavy. He transferred it to the other hand to feel its weight again.

"This is the fruit of our young chairman's efforts. She's done really well!"

The leader handed the maize-cob to his aide and told him to take a look at it. At that moment a tractor cautiously emerged from the thrashing ground where the heaps of maize-cobs and maize-lofts stood cheek by jowl. Pop! pop! pop! pop! It approached. The leader moved aside to make way for it to go out to the field. He watched the blue smoke it was puffing out into the air. The tractor stopped with a jerk, slipping its front wheels before it came to where the leader was standing. A girl hopped down from the vehicle, hurriedly taking off her scarf. She was neatly dressed in short rubber boots and discoloured light brown work clothes.

"Why, it's you, comrade chairman of the farm!"

"Leader!"

The girl stood there in amazement, she could scarcely believe her eyes at this happy event.

"Leader!"

A moment later she exclaimed again, and bounced up to the leader. She was beside herself with joy, grasping his hands. Her manners were so free that she looked like his real daughter. Her face covered with maize bran shone with the ecstasy of delight. In her blinking eyes were something like tears of joy or drops of rain.

"You've been worried about the rain, haven't you? Staying up all night."

The leader felt the sleeves of her wet work clothes.

"It's autumn now, leader. And people can't sleep, even if it doesn't rain."

Her bright face was enough to show the indescribable delight filling the hearts of the farmers who had hailed the bumper harvest.

"Well, how much maize did you reap on the hillside?"

"Nine tons per hectare, leader".

"Oh, so much!"

The great leader looked with satisfaction at the dark hillsides around the farm and the irrigation pipes laid across them. The non-paddy fields were still sleeping in the semi-darkness of early morning. There were stacks of maize standing here and there; and along the edges of long furrowed fields stood tall pumpkin trellises, criss-crossed with straw ropes.

This was once a barren land, where even reeds dried

up in droughts. Now, however, it has fertile fields of maize spreading out and even pumpkins are grown on the trellises.

"Our people know how to work now," the leader commented. "They know how to build up their life, upholding the Party's ideas."

The girl blushed. She was so embarrassed that she kept bringing her hand to her face in spite of herself like a child. This 23-year-old girl looked more like a young schoolgirl than the head of 600 farming families. She seemed not yet accustomed to being praised. Maybe, by nature, she had no inclination to boast of what she had done.

The great leader marvelled at this young farm chairman. She was uncommonly modest and yet as vigorous as a man.

"Did you attend all the lectures at the college for the correspondence students this year?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent. You work hard and study hard, too. Help other correspondence students here to study as hard as you do."

"Yes, I will, leader."

The leader was moving towards the thrashing ground. She was walking at his side, but without knowing what she was doing; her heart was swelling with happiness.

The leader entered the brightly-lit thrashing ground. The farmers stopped the machines all at once and gave him a rousing welcome. "Long live the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung!" "Hurrah!"

The great leader raised his hand in reply to the cheers.

"Thanks for your trouble, comrades. Congratulations on your bumper harvest."

Shouts of hurrah, cheers, cheers, cheers...

The thrashing ground was swept by waves of joy. With a broad smile the leader looked at the high heaps of maize and at the conveyer belt which had stopped, still loaded with the maize grains to be carried into the shed.

"Why did you stop the machines, comrades?" the

great leader asked the farmers standing around him. "Set them to work, come on."

The earth began to shake. The sweet smell of maize came floating out from the thrasher. The leader walked up to the machine that was covered thick with maize bran. It was the very same thrasher that he had sent the girl to celebrate her appointment as chairman of the farm.

"Does it work well?" asked the great leader in a loud voice, stooping down, so as to make himself heard amid the noise of the machine.

She answered wiping the corner of the machine:

"Very well, sir. Without this thrasher, we would have had to pick every grain off the cobs by hand all through the winter."

"Is that so?"

The gratified leader put his hand on the machine. Its easy and regular vibration was pleasing to the ear.

The leader took the baskets of corncobs that were handed over to him one after another and emptied them into the mouth of the thrasher. The machine moved vigorously with a slight quiver.

"We could do with another thrasher like this, leader," said the farm chairman passing a basket over to the leader.

"We've got an awful lot to do, picking apples, leveling and rezoning the fields and making manure. But at present all of us are concentrating on thrashing."

The leader listened to her attentively with an expression of satisfaction on his face; this girl had a zeal to work. She knew what her tasks were and she knew how and when to carry them out.

"Yes, I'll give you another one. I won't spare anything to help you with your work."

The leader patted the girl on the shoulder and walked to the back of the machine. The grains were gushing out of the machine and flowing into the shed, carried along by the conveyer belt. He lifted a handful of them from the belt.

"It would be no easy task to take care of all this grain that is being conveyed so quickly," he thought. He decided he would like to know how they were working

in the sheds and lofts.

"Let me see your sheds."

He followed the farm chairman over to one of the sheds.

The sheds and lofts were lit by electric lamps; they could be seen clearly at a glance. The ground was clean and bright enough to show even a few grains of maize dropped on it. The farmers were bustling about nearby. In the shed they were sweating hard to spread the grains evenly on the floor.

The great leader stood by the head of the conveyer belt and looked at the swelling cone of grains in the shed. As the mountain of grain rose, the grains pouring off the belt formed a heap at the head of the conveyer.

So, the farmers had to stop the conveyer belt and push away the heaped-up grains. The shed was not large enough. They tried hard to fill up the corners. This held up the work. Obviously the farm was lacking in sheds. The great leader placed his hand on the conveyer belt which was at a standstill and looked at the chairman.

"How many more sheds do you need on your farm?"

"About thirty, leader."

"That many?"

"Yes, but I'm not yet sure of the exact number. There are far more maize-cobs gathered up here than we estimated in the fields. And while thrashing, I found the grains so well ripened. They far surpassed our initial estimation."

The great leader strolled about the ground. They had gathered the best harvest they had ever known, and this farm chairman was very worried as to how to handle the crop. This was on the whole a very pleasant situation, but, in the final analysis, it also revealed a shortcoming on the part of the officials concerned.

"You've gathered a bumper harvest, but you don't know how tremendous it is. So you have to keep the maize grains heaped up in the open air. I don't think this problem is confined to your farm."

At the moment, the great leader had a vision of many farms in intermediate zones across the nation, which had reaped in huge quantities of maize this year.

The harvest was an unbelievable success. The weather that year had been precarious; chilly days continued longer than usual in the spring, delaying the sowing in the fields. Then followed a long spell of rain in the summer with a scarcity of sunshine for crops plus an unexpected drought in some areas. The cold front weather, wild and untamed, sweeping the globe, threatened our country. The cold, rainstorms and frequent drought had to be challenged. So a vigorous struggle was launched by the Party and it continued throughout the year. The result was a notable victory over the fierce vicissitudes of nature.

Although many countries were suffering from a food crisis and people in somewhere starving to death a bumper crop was brought in here for all to see. The only problem in this land was where to store all the yields—a proud and happy cause for concern!

No wonder, however, there were some people who were complacent about the lack of storage facilities. Their complacency resulted in loss of grain and delays in thrashing.

It was not a matter to be overlooked, the great leader thought. Not a grain should be lost. All should be stored away in time. The officials should have their attention brought to this matter that had seemed to escape their notice.

"Well, how are you going to make up for the lack of space storage, eh?" he eyed the farm chairman's face thoughtfully.

"I've arranged for the timbers to be sent from Ryanggang Province. We'll build the storages as soon as they arrive."

The leader paused for a moment and shook his head reflectively.

"Won't that take too long? Who knows what changes the weather will bring?"

This put the chairman in a state of perplexity.

"Can't you get them around here?"

The chairman now became utterly bewildered and helpless.

"Haven't you timber-woods on your farm? There they are, wooded hills over there."

The great leader pointed to the wooded hills across the village.

"We aren't allowed to touch a single tree there, dear leader."

"Why not," said he, casting a glance at her worried face.

"There's a strict watchman, a public security man."

"Public security man?"

"Yes, sir. He's been taking care of them for ten years. He doesn't allow anybody to cut down a tree."

The girl was pushing back her hair that had slipped down over her ears. The image of the watchman who had been ignorant of her farm's situation raced through her mind.

The great leader walked on slowly, deliberating. Ten years! Not so long a period, maybe. He was recalling an event that had happened ten years ago. ... His car was turning round a bend in that hill, when he became aware that the hill was bare of trees in places. He jerked to a stop. Then he caught sight of a figure—a watchman for sure.

"Why is this hill so bare of trees?"

"Sorry, respected leader, cooperative farmers have felled them... To make the cold-bed seedling frames. They're carrying licenses with them though."

The great leader looked deeply regretful.

"They're to be blamed, those who give licences carelessly. And so are you as a watchman. The remaining trees are rather young to fell. The hill will become completely bare if it goes on like this."

The leader talked to him for a while, giving him some gentle advice mingled with chiding.... After that the trees began to grow and flourished, and each time he chanced to pass this way he would recall that young man.

"Oh, Comrade Chairman. Seems he's someone I know, judging by what you've said. Now that the trees have grown mature enough for use, come along with me and we'll consult him."

Instantly a light of candid innocence came over the girl's face. She excused herself for a moment, and disappeared among the corn storages. She soon came back carrying a small, white bush-basket. The pretty basket with its red and blue strips was covered by a clean cloth. The girl, taking it carefully in her arms, got into the car.

The car glided out of the village. It passed a good-looking shop in front of the apple orchard and ran along the irrigation channels dotted with mulberry trees. The leader looked out and, turning to her, asked:

"Now then, fish packages are piled up there in the shop yard, but few houses are supplied with fish. Why can't I see eaves hung with strings of fish for drying, eh?"

The girl looked out automatically, but now already the fields were sweeping into sight and the dwellings with their wall pillars hung with corncobs were left behind.

"They are buoyant with the big crops, so seem to care little for their own living, dear leader," the girl said quietly, her head down, but felt the pricks of conscience.

"Well then, how about vegetables for pickling? And the firewood?..."

The girl hesitated again, feeling the basket on her lap.

"Beloved leader, I've been little concerned for their life, but only for the work."

He listened to the young chairman's self-criticism.

"You're in charge of the farm," he said thoughtfully. "So you must look after their life. The busier you get, the better you've to look after them. You must try to know if they've got enough bean soy and paste or salt, and if anyone gets ill, take good care of them. That's the way you can make them work well."

"I will remember in future, sir" she said, her head down again, and she adjusted her posture as if she was too ashamed to sit still.

The car pulled up near the thick forest at the edge of the road. It was dawning. The eastern sky was cloudless, and was glowing red. The fresh, cool air was drifting from the woods.

The great leader was looking at the hills, hands on hips. Everything had grown luxuriant and green. There

was no sign of bareness on the ridges, in the valleys, on the cliffs or anywhere else. Lush greenery extended as far as the eye could see.

Suddenly there was heard a snap—twigs were being broken somewhere, breaking the morning stillness.

"Someone must be there in the bush," said the leader to the chairman.

"It must be the public security man. He comes to look round the hills every morning early and in the evening. He does it while doing his job as a public security man. He has even moved to a house at the foot of the mountain."

"Seems he's a man with a will." The great leader made his way through the woods, in the direction of the sound of the twig snapping. The trees were fully grown and all were healthy. The grass was clean as in the yard, spiced with a faint fragrance of grass and pine resin.

They heard the sound of another twig snapping. The leader, looking around, climbed up a hill and caught sight of a public security man in uniform, under a big tree. He was breaking away a dead branch with a long-handled sickle. His face was turned upward and he was completely absorbed in what he was doing.

The great leader paused to watch him. As the sickle caught a twig, its long handle was pulled down and the dead twig fell away with a snap. This was the way he tended trees and preserved the woods. The leader studied the man's face for a while. He was the very same man he had met ten years before. There was no change in him other than he looked to have put on a little more weight.

The leader went up to him and asked "How are you?"

At the unexpected sound of a voice he turned his head, the sickle-pole in his hands, and instantly let it go. He stood at attention. The pole rested on the branch and was rocking like the pendulum of a clock.

"It's nice of you to take so much care of the trees. Do you tend to them early every morning?"

The fatherly leader stroked his back which smelt of the pine.

'You've grown older since we last met. Remember our meeting on this hill? Already ten years ago." With

these cheerful words, the great leader grasped his resin-stained hand.

"They're old acquaintances?!" the girl thought, throwing a smile towards the man.

"You must have had quite a lot of trouble at that time, I suppose," the leader went on. "All you got then was reproach instead of sympathy. I had no peace of mind either. I was afraid that the hills, fields and even minds might be barren. But I'm relieved now." The great leader continued, gazing into the dense forest:

"The trees have grown dense on the hillsides. When the hills are wooded like this, the soil grows fertile and there will be a good harvest. We'll gather from the fields, orchards and timber hills in abundance. How wonderful!... You've done well, guarding the hills and fields for the country."

The great leader, hands on hips, was contentedly looking at the vast expanse of fields and hills.

"You know, all the farms have had bumper harvest this year and their corn and rice storages cannot contain all the grain. They are short of storage facilities so I was hoping you could afford one thousand cubic metres or so of timbers here. All right?"

"Yes, sir," the man replied, straightening himself up. "I've always anticipated that they would be used for the good of the country someday."

This pleased the leader. He glanced at the chairman who was standing shyly, half hidden behind a tree. Her eyes, open wide, were looking at the public security man. And she thought to herself: H'm, he is not the sort of person I believed him to be.

"You've heard him, Comrade Chairman? Make ready to gather timber and build the storages right away."

The leader was glad to have been of help to the chairman. The leader pulled at the dead branch with the pole. It snapped and fell and he laughed heartily.

"You've well tended. You have dedicated your youth to tending these trees. And they'll be put to use for the benefit of the nation. It's for the people's welfare that both you and I are working. And in it we see the joy and

worth of our lives. I'll remember all the trouble you've taken. Good-bye!" He gave him a firm handshake before walking down to the road where the car was.

The morning sun peeping over the hill was a delight, casting gleams of colour throughout the woods. Shrill birdsong echoed through the trees. The leader stood beside the car, listening to the merry notes of the birds as they flitted from one branch to another.

"Lovely morning, Comrade Chairman!" said the leader, grasping her warmly by the hand. "Well, I must go now. I'll send the thresher you asked for. Make haste with the building of storages. Finish the thrashing quickly, and then have a grand sharing-out ceremony. See you again. At the national meeting of agriculture in Pyongyang, I hope."

The girl's eyes grew misty. She felt like clinging to the leader's sleeves, but she took control of herself and wiped away her tears. She took her basket out of her car.

"Leader!" she addressed the fatherly leader respectfully. "Here are the corncobs we've reaped. Please take a look."

"Is that so?"

"The great leader, with kindly smile, uncovered the basket that was emitting the sweet aroma of steamed corncobs.

"How tasty they look, Comrade!" he said to his aide as he passed him the basket and pressed the cloth edges back into shape. "Thank you, Comrade Chairman. I'll take this to the Party Political Bureau members so that they may taste your harvest."

The girl's face was radiant with ecstatic happiness. The great leader clasped her warmly by the hand once more and got into the car.

The car set off for Pyongyang. The fields and low hills flew by. The car left tracks in the road wet with rain as it left the farm village far behind in the early morning.

The leader, who had been looking out of the window, said to the aide:

"Inform the agricultural officials how matters stood at Kumdae-ri. And urge them to make a careful examina-

tion of the progress of grain thrashing and storing on the cooperative farms throughout the land. Perhaps there are some farms that will delay their thrashing because of shortage of storages and incur the loss of precious grain. Say measures should be taken as quickly as possible. And urge them to give particular consideration to the supply service. Since manpower is badly needed on the farms, if the officials ignore the supply service, that may have an adverse effect on the farmers' lives. Make sure that Administration Council officials take this matter in hand and send the foodstuffs and all other supply goods to the countryside. ... And... ring up the Chairman of the Public Service Commission."

"Yes, sir."

The aide quickly took notes of his instructions in his memo-book, and picked up the receiver.

"He is on the phone, sir."

He took the receiver and said:

"Comrade Chairman? Good morning. I've got something very important to tell you. How many rice cookeries are there in Pyongyang?... Then... what about noodle makers? And the bakeries?"

His expression as he received the answer became sad.

"Is that all? Then there's no hope for us to make the working people's lives comfortable. If things go on this way, we can hardly expect to lighten women's work in the kitchen. We have to build a rice cookery, a bakery and a noodle plant at each *dong*. At each *dong*, understand? Then the housewives won't need to do all the cooking at home because they'll be able to get warm rice and buns."

The leader changed the receiver to his other hand, asking brief questions or nodding to himself.

"All right. Please do so.... And how is the research work in the food processing industry progressing? If it is going well that's commendable. I know the city's working women have benefits of Morning & Evening Counters. You can hardly lessen all their kitchen burdens, though, only with the supplementary foods provided by the processing teams at the groceries. We have to process a wide variety of side-dishes on industrial lines to enrich the

working people's tables."

He paused for a moment and went on to say:

"We, communists, have to free the women from their heavy burden of household chores. It's our noble duty. If not, we cannot expect a final solution to the problem of women. That's why we set this matter as a Party policy and carry it out as part of the technical revolution with three major tasks, understand? When I have a suitable opportunity I'll inquire again about the research work in the food processing industry."

The aide felt his heart becoming full. He took the receiver in his hands and hung it up. He could not repress the swell of emotion; he came to see clearly why the fatherly leader had called up the Public Service Commission's Chairman. Who could fathom the depth of the leader's consideration for our people?

An hour later a car was on the highway; the respected and beloved leader of our people was on his way to the office for the day's work.

Here is his aide's diary which reads:

"Rain in the early morning. The respected and beloved leader visited a distant farm. An unexpected schedule to me. He set out in spite of the drizzle.

"The great leader found a shortage of corn storages on the farm and took steps to ensure that this problem was not repeated on other farms.

"Instructions have been given to the officials concerned to set up a rice cookery, a bakery and a noodle shop in every *dong* in order to cut down on the amount of work women have to do in the kitchen. He also gave pointers towards bringing about the industrialization of food processing quickly.

"And he stressed the need for an adequate supply service in the countryside in view of the shortage of manpower there. Administration Council officials were put in charge of this matter."

The aide raised his head, his diary still open on his lap. The car was parked in the street. He recalled again all that had happened in the few hours before the great leader went to the office.

How preoccupied the great leader is and all his elaborate thoughts are woven with warm love! Today's events were nothing out of the ordinary in his daily routine. Such ordinary events in his life and yet so many tremendous undertakings are being mapped out under his care and there will be an endless story to be told about the things he did today. It may be "colourless" for the leader, but for the nation it was a day relating to the great life of its leader to be recorded in its eternal history—the history of the prosperity of our nation and the blessed people with that great love behind them.

The wide road had been washed clean by the rain. The pavements were crowded with attractively dressed people going to work.

The great leader was looking at them in silence, with a broad, gentle smile on his face. His eyes strayed to a young man who was carrying in his arms a child dressed warmly with a red cap on. Beside him walked his wife, a glossy bag in her hand. The young man touched his wife's hand to draw her attention to the approaching car and bowed respectfully towards it. The other workers slackened their pace and followed suit, expressing profound reverence and thanks. The great leader gave a slight nod in reply. The aide could feel his heart swelling and his eyes growing moist.

The great leader and the happy people! The aide said to himself, unable to contain his excitement. People must remember! The leader has been to a farm village, while you were still asleep. And out of his concern for the working women's chores, he has proposed building a rice cookery, a bakery and a noodle shop in every living quarter.

Maybe there are people who take the changes in their environments for granted—those welfare service establishments that mushroomed to lessen the burden of women in the kitchen and the industrially produced side dishes supplied to their homes.

Maybe they think the great leader was just on his way to the office early as usual. But is that really the case?

Translated by Kim Yong Mun

Military March No. 1

About a Composer Who Served in the Korean War

Chong Gi Jong

Only when the military parade was in full swing did I perceive that my cheeks were wet with tears. I wondered when the tears had first begun to fall.

I weep as loud military orders ring out, the swords of the commanders flash in the sun, and the soldiers, presenting arms, look up at the rostrum as they march smartly past following their raised regimental colours, covered in battle honours. Through moist eyes I watch the soldiers standing motionless in the turrets of the tanks which roll past on their powerful caterpillars and evoke memories in me of the wide sweep of our army's history. I shed tears as I listen to the sound of marching feet reverberating through the square, the music of the brass bands, and the rumble of the gun carriages, combining to convey the impression of a steady and tremendous army on the march.

I have reached the evening of my life. It may not be proper for me to weep before the eyes of those soldiers who are holding this military parade to mark the 40th anniversary of Korean liberation, and at the sight of this demonstration of the nation's power and the invincibility of its armed forces. But I do not try to conceal my tears. This is because they are tears of stirring excitement and

ecstatic joy, tears of happiness, tears caused by the recollection of personal heartaches mingled with reverence.

* * *

I remember distant days of my life. It is October 1950. An army unit is moving along a steep mountain track. As the bayonets move forward, the trees and the ground slide away behind them. The soldiers in battle-stained uniforms, a political worker who comes from the south carrying only a knapsack on his shoulders, a nurse who has been left behind alone and the wounded soldiers are climbing and crossing trackless mountain ranges and steep ridges. I was amongst them and, putting on a felt hat pulled well over my eyes, walked north with heavy steps.

Fallen leaves were trampled underfoot, sometimes mingled with the handbills scattered by the enemy. Their tanks with gun barrels swivelling arrogantly were often to be seen driving along the distant highways, raising a cloud of dust. The enemy, too, were continuing to push northwards.

It seemed strange to be moving on a parallel course to the enemy, knowing that somewhere, sooner or later, we would come together and fierce life-and-death battles would be fought.

The unit suddenly came to a halt at the top of a mountain pass.

"Why are we stopping? What's happened?"

"Well, we'll soon know."

There was a confused noise of many voices, one joining in after another like wildfire spreading through dry grass that gathered to a crescendo. And yet I was so totally exhausted that I fell asleep on my feet. As if in a dream I heard a loud voice talking about the "second front" and the "order from Supreme Headquarters". But I was not sufficiently conscious to understand what it was all about.

"The soldiers of independent units and others who have fallen behind their units are to be assigned to a newly-organized unit."

For me it was all happening in a dream. In my dream I heard the soldiers near me talking.

"What? What did he say?"

"He said we should be provided with new uniforms. How nice! It is like a dream, isn't it?"

"I should have a shave first, old Dok Su."

"But what shall I use to shave? I've lost my razor."

"You needn't worry. We'll be fighting behind enemy lines, so we must recapture it from the enemy for our use."

Somebody called out in a low yet authoritative voice: "Be quiet!" Then the loud voice I had heard a short time before cried out: "Those comrades who can play musical instruments, take three paces forward." It was not until this order reached my ears that I became fully awake. As I came to, I realized that everybody was looking at me and, the next moment, I took several steps forward although I did not know why I was doing so.

"Who are you?" asked a young major, who was dressed in new padded winter clothes fastened with a belt. The chief of staff of the independent brigade told him about me.

"He's a composer," he explained. "On his way to the front our retreat began, and he has not yet been assigned to any unit."

"Is that so?"

The young major scrutinized my shabby attire and, wetting his lips, said: "Good. Well met. Go and see the corps commander this minute. I'll delegate a soldier to lead the way."

"The corps commander?" I replied in surprise. "You mean he wants to see me?"

The young major smiled.

"He has his reasons," he said. "He will be pleased to see you."

While he was escorting me to the staff headquarters, the rifleman the major had sent with me explained what was happening.

He informed me that the corps commander I was going to meet had met the respected Supreme Commander Comrade Kim Il Sung, who had assigned him the task of

fighting behind enemy lines and given him detailed instructions. Therefore, the corps commander had dispatched officers to the main mountain ridges through which the units in the strategic temporary retreat would have to

pass, so that they could stop them from proceeding northwards and tell them about the new battle order from Supreme Headquarters. Meanwhile, he had begun to refit and reorganize the units to fight in the enemy-held areas.

"The corps commander ordered us to find people who can play musical instruments," said the rifleman. "Perhaps he is going to organize a large military band. Two days ago the divisional band arrived here, but there is only half of its regular compliment left now. What is worse, they say, a drum was torn and various other instruments damaged beyond recognition and so they were thrown away. The corps commander became furious on hearing this. 'Who is the bandmaster?' he bellowed. He sent for the man and scolded him, saying: 'In the first place, you are not qualified as a soldier, still less as a bandmaster. Although they were torn and battered, the instruments were your weapons. Yet you threw them away before you reached here. Did you ever see a soldier without a weapon, you stupid man?' He roared out orders for him to be punished at once."

I was somewhat taken aback at what I was hearing. When he noticed the expression on my face he smiled kindly and continued: "Don't worry, sir. They say that our old corps commander is as fierce as a tiger when he is angry. But it all depends on how things are going. He often used to arm-wrestle us soldiers."

I was getting on for 40, and so it was certain that he was not going to challenge me to an arm-wrestling contest but would behave differently towards me. However, I did not say a word in reply. It was with a vague feeling of nervousness that I met the corps commander for the first time a little later on.

We walked past the farmhouses with decayed thatched roofs which were heavily laden with white gourds as big as earthenware jars, and the rifleman took me to the lodgings of the corps commander. Unfortunately, at that moment the commander was saying in an indignant voice to the officers standing around him.

"In times like these all sorts of rogues show up. How much did the racketeers steal?"

The first lieutenant, holding an automatic rifle in his hand, answered:

"They carried away two cartfuls of rice."

"What rats! They pilfered the state's food which the people had hidden though they were going hungry. What did you do with them?"

"We finished off the main culprit."

"Well done. We should show people that although we are behind enemy lines, the Government of the DPRK still exists and its laws and public order hold sway wherever the soldiers of the People's Army are."

It was only then that I caught the eye of the corps commander. But it seemed he was very agitated for he only glanced at me and continued to talk to the first lieutenant.

"Extend the combat guard as far as the highways," he ordered. "Deploy more machine guns, so that not a single enemy dare show his face."

"Yes, sir!"

"And all the units are to carry out a meticulous examination of their combat equipment and count their ammunition. Report the results to me. In particular, mortars and anti-tank guns...."

With this the corps commander looked around at the officers. His eyes again rested on me. He paused now and looked back at his adjutant with a stern expression in his eyes. The adjutant made haste to report who I was.

"Is that so?" said the corps commander, and smiled a welcome to me. "I am glad to see you, Mr. Musician."

The corps commander looked me over carefully with raised bushy eyebrows slanting slightly to the corners of his forehead. He signalled the officers about him to wait. He then questioned me in detail about my personal record. For some unknown reason I felt that he kept casting a dissatisfied look at the soft hat I was holding in my hand.

"I intend to saddle you with an important task.... Would you agree to try?"

"I think I must try," I started but immediately corrected myself.

"Please give me a task, Comrade Corps Commander," I said.

I even stood at attention just as military men did. The corps commander stared at me with narrowed eyes. Then he turned to the adjutant who had remained standing behind him.

"Give the musician a military uniform," he told him in a serious tone of voice. "You should already have done so.... What in the world can he do with a felt hat on?"

I was compelled to put on a military uniform. In the light of the wartime situation the corps headquarters decided to confer on me the title of senior captain consonant with my duties as a war composer.

"Good! Very good!" exclaimed the corps commander when I reappeared before him in uniform. "Now I'll give you your task. As you know, from now on our corps has to fight behind enemy lines on the instructions of General Kim Il Sung. All you have to do here is organize a good military band. Because you are a musician, you yourself will know better than anybody how important this work is. Get on with your task right away. Pick out qualified people and draw up a plan for replenishing the musical instruments you are short of. The sooner, the better. If you meet with any difficulties, you may come to me direct. Is there anything else you need to know?"

"All understood, Comrade Corps Commander."

In an instant I changed from a civilian in a soft hat into a uniformed soldier. Thus began the second movement of my life's symphony.

I followed the personnel officers, and returned to the mountain ridge where I had halted wearing my felt hat for the last time, the very ridge where other units on the temporary retreat were supposed to cross.

We stopped large and small units, as well as soldiers who were heading northwards on their own. We told them of the General's policy of forming the second front and his relevant orders. At the end I would appeal to them:

"Anyone who knows how to play a musical instrument, take three paces forward."

Many soldiers said that they could play guitars, har-

monicas and six-holed bamboo flutes. But there was not a single bugler, who was whom I was looking for. Towards evening the next day, I succeeded in achieving my purpose.

I was standing facing the soldiers of a battalion whose clothes were badly scorched and whose sleeves were in tatters. They must have fought fierce do-or-die battles somewhere.

"Comrades who can play musical instruments are to step forward!"

Nobody present could believe their ears. They had just heard important announcements concerning "the General's orders" and "fights in the enemy-occupied areas". Perhaps this was why it seemed to take them a little time to grasp that what I wanted was a bandsman rather than a review of the whole course of their thousand-kilometre-long journey.

"This is very important," I called out. "Isn't there anybody for the job among you?"

The soldiers were all puzzled by my question. At long last a platoon leader with a swarthy, wiry face took a step forward.

"Are you a musician?" asked the young major, who had previously called me out at this very same spot when I was still wearing my felt hat. "What sort of instrument can you play?"

"I can play a wind instrument. But I am a platoon leader. An engineering platoon leader!... You don't intend to enlist me as a signalman, do you?"

My face brightened to see him. It had not been easy to find such a suitable man.

"No, we don't. We are now organizing a military band."

I was afraid that this well-qualified man who had turned up unexpectedly might suddenly vanish into thin air. I hurried towards him with open arms.

"Not so fast!" the engineer platoon leader suddenly shouted in a harsh and commanding voice. I stopped short, startled.

"What did you say just now? Are you going to drag me there?"

"Drag you?... No, I didn't mean to do that. I...." I faltered, for words failed me. The platoon leader stood glaring at me, his eyes blazing with anger. He grasped his holster firmly as if I had attempted to wrest his weapon from him, and took a step backward.

"Don't bother. I remind you again that I am a platoon leader. In addition, our fighting behind enemy lines will soon begin. Now, where are you proposing to take me?"

An icy stillness fell. The chilly wind blew across the mountains and scattered dead leaves over the shoulders of the soldiers who remained standing in stony silence.

At that moment somebody shouted desperately from the far end of the file. "Don't go, Comrade Platoon Leader!" On hearing that unusual tone of voice, I jerked my head round to see a wounded soldier supported by a young nurse. What was worse, his eyes were swathed in bandages. The blind soldier was tightly clutching one side of his chest with his arm. His gesture suggeted that he was trying to give vent to some fury which was pent up in his inmost heart and which nobody knew.

"Don't go, Comrade Platoon Leader. Did we come all this way to do such a job? If our comrades who lie buried by the Rakdong River knew of this, what do you think they would say, eh?!"

Like a high-voltage current, a wave of thrilling emotion swept through the ranks. This time the nurse spoke in place of the platoon leader, who was standing with knitted brows, frowning and saying nothing.

"We can rest assured," she said. "The platoon leader will not go anywhere. We all pledged our word to wreak vengeance upon the enemy on the Rakdong River, didn't we? Don't worry. The platoon leader will stay with us."

Again silence reigned. I felt a constriction in my throat.

The young major also stood in silence, although he had been given an important role in returning the northward-bound units to the front behind enemy lines.

Beyond a maple tree whose top branches spread wide, an officer who was apparently in charge of the unit abruptly shouted out words of command in a husky voice, as if

to declare that there was no further room for argument.

"Battalion, left turn!.... Forward after me!..."

The unit began to descend the mountain ridge. The tattered uniforms and the submachine guns and American-made rifles which they had snatched from the enemy slipped past me.

I could not take my eyes off the rough and wiry engineer platoon leader, the soldier with the bandages over his eyes and the unit's one and only nurse who was helping him along. Indeed, they were a miniature of all the companies and battalions across a vast distance who were making the grim strategic temporary retreat....

The young major came up to me and said:

"Why didn't you talk him round? If you fail like that, it will be difficult for you to carry out your task."

I made no reply.

All of a sudden I felt the sleepiness and weariness I had been oblivious to until now descending on me like a wave. For the first time I wondered whether, when compared with the arduous and heavy task of fighting in the enemy-occupied area, what I was doing was an infinitesimal and almost insignificant job. Of course, as a composer, I could impress upon the soldiers that the force of military music is incomparably greater than hundreds and thousands of guns and ammunition and is not restricted by time. But for whom is this necessary at present? For that soldier whose eyes are covered with bandages? Or for that platoon leader who has lost more than half of his charges and fumes wildly, blowing hard like a bellows?....

In spite of myself I followed the battalion which had already descended the ridge. I did not even know the motive behind my action.... I was anxious to follow the engineering platoon leader and try and persuade him to join the military band, but I had not the courage to do so.

The battalion was already making for the village in which many units of the independent brigade were billeted. It seemed as if the powder smoke of the grim war had not yet reached this out-of-the-way farm village nestling amongst mountain valleys. It was a scene of bustle;

volumes of smoke were belching from chimneys; brushwood gates banged open or shut; dogs barked; and children with dishevelled hair ran around in groups, shouting shrilly.

The battalion halted at the entrance to the village. The commanding officers shouted out words of command, straightening themselves, and the soldiers formed in ranks. Just at that moment the nurse saw me and exclaimed in surprise.

"Oh my! Look at that officer. He has followed us here."

On hearing what she said, the soldier with bandages over his eyes turned his head in the opposite direction from where I stood, and asked:

"Whom do you mean? Who has followed us?"

"I mean that officer who a little while ago asked our platoon leader to join the military band..."

If at that precise moment the wiry platoon leader had not given me a fierce and reproachful stare and cautioned them to hold their tongue, I would have got into a very nasty situation.

When the unit began to march again, I heard the blinded soldier spit out in an indignant voice.

"Damn it! If only I could see what sort of man he is!..."

From the precise moment when I heard these words flung at me like brick bats I no longer had the heart to follow the unit. It seemed to be a far cry to my becoming a serviceman who could march in step with the other soldiers at the same word of command, although I wore a military uniform. The distance between me and the receding unit would be covered by a few steps, and yet it might be equivalent to the whole course of my life....

I could hear horses snorting loudly and then two mounted men appeared on the path leading to the village, lost in the gloom of approaching night. The leading rider saw me and drew in his reins. Although dusk was falling I recognized him as the corps commander by his gold-striped brasshat. I hastily stepped to the edge of the road and took off my cap.

"Hello, Mr. Musician!" The corps commander addressed me. He dismounted and handed the reins to his adjut-

ant, who stood behind him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, softly. This led me to conclude that he was joking with me.

"Comrade Corps Commander, please drop the honorifics. You are requested not to mister me because I am a plain—"

The commander remained silent looking serious. When he spoke after a long time, I sensed the stern reproof in his voice which was slow and serious.

"Mr. Musician, as a man dressed in the same uniform as you, I must remind you that that is a military cap, and not a felt hat."

Only then did I put on the cap which I was holding in my hands.

"But what are you doing here? How about the assignment I gave you?"

I faltered out that it was no easy task to find the people I needed. Then I added that I had found a suitable person in the battalion that had just arrived, and then went into a tedious explanation of the reason why I had failed to persuade him. Having heard my prolix report which was quite unmilitary, the corps commander fell into a meditative mood for some moments, nodding his head. He then gestured to me to walk on together with him.

"I, too, am on the way to see the newly-arrived battalion. So how about trying to persuade the man again? I'll give you plenty of cover fire."

I was at a loss what to say. How on earth could I change the minds of the engineer platoon leader and the soldier with the bandaged eyes? It would be futile to try to persuade them. As I had failed in my first attempt, I was still trying to find a reply when the corps commander asked, "Why, have you no courage to try again?

"Ha, ha.... You are a homburg, no doubt," said the corps commander, waiting for me to catch him up. "Don't think ill of me, I'm just joking."

I felt as if I was suddenly enwrapped in warm confidence and amity. Now, for the first time since I had made his acquaintance, I could talk to him frankly, not

caring about his military rank as corps commander.

"Since it's my task, I'll do it at all costs."

"Good," said the corps commander. But, pulling my sleeve, he added: "But, Mr. Musician, take care not to resort to any coercive method. I respect a courageous fighter even if he is a plain soldier, you know."

Some time later I found myself seated with the corps commander on the earthen porch of a blue tile-roofed building used formerly as a democratic propaganda hall. Numerous soldiers surrounded us—the corps commander, to be more exact. I listened attentively to their conversation.

At this very place which I still vividly remember, the corps commander chatted for a long time with each of the soldiers. He heard about the road their battalion had followed, about their battles and about their inmost thoughts. While talking with the soldiers, the corps commander happened to notice the soldier with the wounded eyes behind the soldiers who had closely surrounded him. He called to him to come closer.

"Where did you hurt your eyes?"

"While covering our unit's withdrawal from the Rakdong River, sir."

The soldier's voice was soft. His reply was supplemented by the tough-looking engineer platoon leader.

"Comrade Corps Commander, at the time the enemy had made a pontoon bridge in an attempt to send a column of trucks across the river. A unit was sent out on a mission to explode the bridge.... When the mission was fulfilled, only this comrade was left alive."

"So you have come all the way from the Rakdong River!" The corps commander's voice was soft, too. "You covered all that distance with bandaged eyes? Splendid!"

"No, Comrade Corps Commander," retorted the soldier suddenly, raising his head. "That day I was lying on the riverbank, I couldn't even get to my feet. And—I was rescued by my comrade platoon leader and this nurse. And she has supported me all the way until today, for hundreds of miles. I have given her an awfully hard time, but she—"

I took a close look at the girl. Her pale face looked haggard in the dim light of the pine-resin lamp which filtered through the open doorway of the room. Her eyes were downcast and the stoop of her narrow shoulders seemed to tell what an arduous road she had followed.

The corps commander looked at the girl for a long time. Then he rose to his feet and placed his hand on her frail shoulder.

"Thank you, nurse. Thank you, indeed."

"Comrade Corps Commander!"

"Thank you. That is all I can say. You really are a brave soldier and an admirable nurse."

The girl lowered her head.

"What did you do before you joined the army?"

"I was a teacher, sir."

"A teacher?"

"Yes, sir. Not far from here there is a middle school, in Sambong and—"

"H'm. So that's your home village?"

"Yes."

The corps commander patted her on her narrow shoulder without a word for a while. Then he stated in a calm yet solemn voice:

"Comrade nurse, let me formally offer you sincere gratitude in the name of the corps commander!"

The girl straightened herself and whispered something quickly. My view of her was blocked by the corps commander's broad shoulders, and I could not hear her words distinctly. Yet I was sure that she must have expressed her resolve to do her duty as a soldier by faithfully carrying out any task as conscientiously as possible and with devoted care. The corps commander continued:

"The Supreme Commander has formed a front behind enemy lines, because he believes in you all. He places his confidence in such soldiers as this one here and the nurse, and he has set forth a policy of fighting in the enemy's rear to tide over the critical situation."

The corps commander could not find the words to fully express his deep emotions. He hugged the soldier with the bandaged eyes and the nurse tightly.

"How have you been getting along? It must have been hard for you. There must have been many times when you were hard pressed, eh? But, from now on, you will fight to your hearts' content. On the second front! There will be many hardships to endure but ultimately victory is

certain! So, before the great battles start you ought to go to the clinic; that is an order. You must go there and have your eyes treated—why don't you say something?"

"Comrade Corps Commander, let me stay here. As there is no hope of my eyes being cured, I want to stay with my comrades—and help by handing them ammunition at least—"

"What are you talking about? Who said your eyes are incurable? The corps commander is ordering that they should be cured unconditionally!"

It was an expression of the legitimate indignation of those who only know that any orders must be carried out without reservation.

"They will be cured. The doctors will manage it. You must believe this! Didn't I tell you? When the General planned to form the second front behind enemy lines, he didn't do so because he had any corps in reserve. As you know, only a corps commander was sent out. But look! A large corps is being formed already—

"I know you are worried in case you will be dropped from the ranks. Don't worry. We are planning to reorganize the ranks and carry out some training. When one's goal is clear-cut, one walks with composure. Now, a brass band is being reinforced. I intend to begin our struggle in the enemy's rear with a parade. I mean to hold a proper parade with bugles blowing just as the General did when he founded the Guerrilla Army and held its first parade. I intend to follow the example he set when he made that parade the first action of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army."

Here, the corps commander paused. He was smiling as if at the recollection of indelible memories. Then he burst into song.

"Get ready, comrades, arms in hand...." he roared out and shook his clenched fist in time to the music. He belted out the words in a deep, husky voice.

"This is the 'Guerrilla March', the march of the Korean revolution. We marched to this tune in the past and we are still marching to it. And what I intend is that this time, too, we will have a parade in keeping with the

'Guerrilla March' and go straight to the battleground. You understand? The whole corps will be keeping step and start for the battle, as planned by the General. So the gun reports on the second front will begin with the 'Guerrilla March'."

Only then did the corps commander turn round to look at me.

"What do you say, Mr. Musician?"

Needless to say, I was at a complete loss for words. I had nothing to add to what he had just said. To be honest, although I was a composer,I had never tried to analyze the significance of any melody with such profundity and clarity or to explain it as succinctly as he had just done.

While I hesitated, the corps commander looked round at the soldiers who were emaciated but full of spirit.

"By the way, we want to reinforce the brass band. But we are short of instruments and men who can play them. Without a vigorous brass band there can be no parade. I wonder if there is a suitable person among you comrades. And if any of you have any suggestions for getting hold of some instruments, come on. Speak out."

At such a time the corps commander must have had a mountain of work to do in a very limited time. Every minute must have been precious to him. However, I could detect no sign of impatience in him. His sole concern seemed to be the formation and reinforcement of the brass band.

Some moments later the soldier with the bandaged eyes spoke out, supported by the nurse.

"There is a suitable person, Comrade Corps Commander."

The corps commander looked surprised.

"Then—you?"

"No, sir."

This time two persons replied in unison. I was highly delighted to see the steely engineer platoon leader with the swarthy complexion and sharp eyes taking a step forward.

"Platoon leader?—What can you do?"

"After liberation I belonged to a factory amateur art

circle; I have played the bugle and the accordion, too."

"Have you? Ha, ha—very good."

"But, Comrade Corps Commander," the platoon leader looked sideways at me. "I'll never leave my platoon. Allow me to return to my unit as soon as the parade is over."

"H'm—"

The corps commander nodded in approval.

"May I make another request?"

"What is it?"

"I'll try to get some musical instruments. The Sambong middle school is about 30 kilometres from here. I am told that there is a set of wind instruments there."

The corps commander was thoughtful for a few seconds, then turned towards the nurse.

"It must have been you who told him about it, mustn't it, school teacher?"

"Yes, sir," she answered in a faint voice.

"Humph—" the corps commander raised his bushy eyebrows. "When the corps commander asks a question, you whisper to the platoon commander?—When was such a habit formed between you two?"

As the crowd stirred with gentle laughter, the girl's pale face turned crimson.

"No, Comrade Corps Commander. Really I—"

The girl did not know where to put herself. The flame of the pine resin lamp flickered on her youthful face which, to this day, is engraved on my memory.

Presently the corps commander said he could send some of the soldiers belonging to other units, who had had sufficient rest. The engineer platoon leader repeatedly requested that he should be sent to ensure that the most suitable instruments were picked out and that his men should be allowed to accompany him. The corps commander said okay. Finally he called the senior adjutant, who was commanding the battalion.

"Go to the staff of the independent brigade this minute and receive further instructions. Your battalion is under its command. After supper, make sure that the private is sent to the clinic. I'll tell them about him, too."

The corps commander departed and presently a raid-

ing party was selected for the special mission. As for me, I had had no experience in such matters and I was not sure what I could do to help them. I scurried about, giving them a lot of advice which would be virtually useless from a military viewpoint and lending a hand in their preparations. I felt an urge to have a word with the engineer platoon leader and reemphasize my request that he be sure to get some drums come what may. I was on my way to see him when I happened to hear him talking with the nurse.

"You shouldn't have volunteered to accompany us. You could have just shown us the spot on the map—"

The girl lost no time in whispering.

"Oh, no. I must go along."

"The villagers said the place was occupied by the enemy, too."

"Possibly."

"We might be plunging into danger."

"Maybe."

"Take my advice seriously, for God's sake."

"Don't worry. We are going together. Everything will be all right. I'm sure of it."

"How stubborn you are!"

"That's enough. Don't go on or we'll end up quarrelling again."

An out-of-season cricket began chirping forlorn complaints near a farm house chimney. Young chicks that were still awake gave enthusiastic replies from beyond the fence.

I turned on my heels. I, of course, don't know what road the tough engineer platoon leader and the dove-pure nurse had traversed together. But I can say without hesitation that in the harshest days of ordeal their mutual affection had budded out and blossomed.

Had not a horseman at that moment galloped straight towards us, I would have seen them off without repeating my earnest request to the platoon leader.

The horseman was the corps commander's ADC.

"Mr. Musician, where are you? And where are comrade platoon leader and the nurse?"

As the platoon leader answered aloud, the ADC dismounted and produced a piece of paper from his breast pocket.

"Comrade platoon leader, this was prepared by Comrade Corps Commander. He said he was entrusting it to comrade nurse in person. He wants you to hand it without fail to a member of the school's teaching staff."

We clustered round the ADC and opened the folded piece of paper under his flashlight. It was not very big. It was a receipt with the items and their quantity written by a dexterous hand. I was astounded and read it again and again.

"...

The above-mentioned quantity is duly received.

October XX, 1950

xxxxxxxxxx

Commander

XXXX Unit, Korean People's Army"

The nurse neatly folded the receipt and put it in her bosom. And then they departed.

From then on I no longer felt tired or sleepy. I understood now how to chat with the soldiers and how to appeal to them. So I succeeded in finding an old stableman who was said to have been a bugler in the Japanese Oda Circus, and a trombone player, who had formerly been in an army brass band but had kept his old post secret and reenlisted himself as a fully-fledged assistant gunner of a heavy-machine gun company.

At the earliest hour of the morning I dropped in at the clinic. The soldier's eyes were still bandaged and he was awake. No sooner had I spoken to him than he felt for my hands and clasped them in his.

"Sir, I am really sorry about yesterday—Forgive me."

"Don't say that. If anyone should apologize, it is me. And here I am. Did they check you up?"

There was no reply. As his hands gripped mine harder and harder, I realized that I had touched his sore spot in spite of myself.

"Don't worry, sir," he said finally. "Everything will be all right."

Everything will be all right. Last night the pallid-faced nurse whispered the same thing.

"Sir, when the 'Guerrilla March' is played, I must be there for sure."

"Why not! Do come."

"But—why is there no news yet?"

I knew what he meant. He couldn't sleep because he was more concerned for his comrades-in-arms who had left for the enemy zone than for his own misfortune. I was moved to tears by the warmth and tenderness of his heart.

"They'll be back soon. You know what kind of people they are. I'm sure they'll come."

Unconsciously I repeated what the young nurse had said.

The engineer platoon leader and his party returned late that morning. I was informed of their arrival belatedly while I was rearranging a melody. I immediately left off what I was doing and hurried towards the democratic propaganda hall. When I saw bugles and drums stacked on the earthen porch, I pressed on with an impulse to hug them all. All at once I stopped short, petrified. There was a stretcher on the porch. I saw the platoon leader and other soldiers glued to the floor beside the stretcher. The corps commander was seated at the head of the stretcher, a soldier's padded jacket draped over his shoulders.

On the stretcher lay the nurse. Her dishevelled forelocks were plastered to her forehead with sweat. The arm she had raised with great difficulty was trembling convulsively. The corps commander held her thin wrist with his hand.

"Comrade Corps Commander, I—handed over the receipt. Fortunately—the old watchman was there—"

"H'm—"

"Comrade Corps Commander—you must be very busy—but you are here, taking care of me like this—"

"Nurse, I have come because I was told that you were back."

"Thank you, Comrade Corps Commander. When the march is struck—I would like to keep in step—"

"With us, of course."

The corps commander's voice was tearfully contracted. "Yes, we surely will keep step together as we march to the parade ground on the Victory Day!"

The girl replied by smiling with an effort. Mustering up her last effort, she raised her head a little and looked for somebody. As the engineer platoon leader bent towards her, she clasped his rough hand and dropped her head....

Even now I don't know the exact circumstances under which she had fought and how she came to be fatally wounded. No one told me and I thought it indelicate to ask. I only heard that at a critical moment when she could have been saved if she had been prepared to discard the drums, she would not do so. Because the march which would mark the commencement of the warfare behind enemy lines was to begin with the sound of the drums.

A few days later the combined forces on the second front held a parade to the stirring tune of the "Guerrilla March". The parade was unconventional. The soldiers were fully armed, even carrying portable shovels and heavy machine guns on their shoulders and some of them had bandaged heads, and they went straight to the battleground after the parade. That day there was another unique sight. Among the brass band there stood a drummer whose eyes were bandaged.

"Let me beat a drum."

The day before the parade, the blind soldier came to me and made the request.

"Please allow me, sir, to fulfil my duty as a soldier for the last time. I know it won't be easy for me, sir. But—it'll be all right as long as I keep in step with the pulse of my heart, won't it?"

I do not regard that day's parade as separate from the grand parade now passing before my eyes. How many dreams, wishes, and unfulfilled duties and aspirations are being carried by those soldiers marching past!

Many of those who attended the parade that was held

behind enemy lines, which is not well known, are no longer with us. The engineer platoon leader subsequently died a heroic death in battle in the Mt. Palgong area in enemy-held territory, while commanding an infantry company. The corps commander who led the whole combined forces on the second front after reviewing the parade is no longer alive. However, they are marching alongside with those regimental colours, the symbol of matchless heroism. They are alive among those invincible ranks who are marching in fine array in keeping with the "Guerrilla March", the first march of the Korean revolution which began with the founding of our revolutionary armed forces and is still being carried forward today.

Translated by Kim Yong Mun

Homeland

Li Myong Gyun

1

One day a Foreign Office official came to see me and asked if I knew a woman named An Yun Ju. "She is an overseas Korean—living in Canada—24 years old," he explained.

I was quite perplexed. I had never heard about that name, and I had no acquaintance in Canada.

"She is arriving at three o'clock this afternoon by air," the official continued. "She is coming to visit the homeland—we received her special request to meet you, Mr. Cho In Guk, through one of our diplomatic missions."

I stared at the Foreign Office official with wide eyes.

"An Yun Ju, you said? I don't know her. The name sounds quite strange to me."

"Your name is specifically mentioned—Mr. Cho In Guk."

The official looked dubiously at me.

"There must have been some mistake. It is possible that there is a person with the same name as mine, isn't it?"

"I don't think so. The name of your institute is mentioned also. So she means you no doubt. Haven't you ever been to Canada, sir?"

"No, I've been to Africa—"

"That's strange."

The Foreign Office official smiled doubtfully. For a few moments he was at a loss what to do with the matter, before he looked at his watch and advanced a proposal:

"The plane is arriving an hour later. How about doing this way? Would you be kind enough to take the trouble to go to the airport with me? She is our guest coming over from the distant western corner of the globe—you'll know all about this once you meet her. The request was made by specifically mentioning your name—"

So I seated myself in the car bound for the airport.

An Yun Ju—Canada—Canada had attracted my eyes only when I chanced to read a world map; it belonged to the Western world which had nothing to do with me. And An Yun Ju is said to be residing in Canada—who could she be?

The car passed Ryonmot-dong into the suburbs of the capital, where it started to fly like a bird. The fresh young leaves of the gingko trees lining either side of the wide asphalted expressway looked cute like hands of little babies. On the right and left of the road spread fields far and wide where tender light-green maize saplings just transplanted rippled in a pleasant early summer breeze, dotted with the red and blue hoods of girl farmers which looked like flowers.

"You mean you have no idea at all? You might have met her in a foreign country. It's possible that you met with an overseas Korean, isn't it?"

Met with an overseas Korean?! I suddenly recalled an overseas Korean whom I had met in an alien land. But there could be no reason for him to want to see me. He was an unKorean overseas Korean who denied his nationality.

It was four years ago when I met with him at the first port on the Indian Ocean which my ship called at after the Malacca Strait on her way to Africa. I was interested in tropical plants, and as I was free that day I spent the whole afternoon in a relatively large botanical garden. I walked through thickets of palm and rubber trees and with interest watched the leaves of hard, durable teak trees which resembled tobacco leaves. And I wiped the sweat caused by the sultry tropical heat under the smooth branchless coconut trees which formed a spacious shade with their strangely tangled leaves overhead. It was a futile attempt to see all the plants cultivated in the botanical garden which amounted to more than 5,000 species. And yet, my tenacious curiosity kept me there until dusk began to fall.

I suddenly became aware that it was time to return to the ship and hurried out of the garden; the street lamps had already been lighted. I looked about to ask someone how to get to the harbour. (I got out of a gate different from the one I had gone through, and I was not sure about the right direction. The vast botanical garden had a number of exits.)

Fortunately, I happened to find nearby an old man leaning on a walking stick standing side by side with a girl in a white suit and a charming pair of grass sandals, local speciality. I made for them. While I was approaching, I heard the girl whispering to the old man in a distinct voice.

"What kinds of trees do we have in our country, father?"

She was speaking in Korean. The old man replied in a husky voice, also in Korean.

"We don't envy others for that matter. The base of Mt. Paekdu is thick with spruce, birch and cedar, while the shores of the South Sea with orange trees and bam-

boos. We have all plants of frigid, temperate and subtropical zones—"

They were Koreans! For the first time in my life I experienced the indescribable joy of meeting compatriots in a foreign country.

"Oh, you are fellow countrymen?!"

I accosted them and offered greetings. The old man and girl were taken aback, and turned round to look at me. The old man was somewhat short but stocky. His forehead was completely bald and a little amount of hair remaining around his skull was white and his eyebrows were frosted. But his small eyes had a glint. He was donned in European style and had something gentle about him. The girl looked about 20. Her pretty eyes were smiling and a thin necklace glittered around her slender neck.

I repeated, "I'm delighted. I too am a Korean."

But, quite unexpectedly, at my words the faces of the old man and girl clouded suddenly. Their eyes betrayed apprehensions. The old man hesitated a few moments before in an apathetic tone he replied in English: "I don't understand you—"

I was utterly puzzled. This old man and his daughter might be from south Korea or be residing abroad and be vigilant against a stranger. But I had never imagined that they would pretend not to know the Korean language itself. I looked at these strange "Koreans" who a moment ago had been speaking in Korean between themselves but pretended to be ignorant of it.

I felt anger surging up in my heart. Pretending not to know Korean means denying their being Koreans, doesn't it? I reasoned to myself. Denying their being Koreans though they are Koreans?! Whether from south Korea or living elsewhere it is impossible that they deny their being Koreans. Denying their nationality is denying their homeland that gave birth to them. It means a son denying his mother.

The girl looked embarrassed momentarily, obviously because she had seen fury in my eyes. But the old man kept himself cool and in a composed manner pulled his daughter by the arm and turned on his heels. His attitude

revealed clearly that he was not interested in talking with me any more.

I was gripped by fury and suspicion at the same time. What sort of man is that old fellow? I wondered. What sort of man is a Korean who denies his being a Korean? Maybe he committed some grave crime against the country? And I thought it was probable, and looked over them from behind with abhorrence.

At this moment a local naval officer in uniform with an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder walked past me with a brisk gait. I asked him clumsily in his native language how to get to the harbour. The bronze-coloured tough-looking naval officer with bright eyes stopped short and kindly indicated the way. While speaking to me he scrutinized me, a foreigner, with curiosity; and the moment his eyes rested on the left side of my chest, he suddenly stood in attention. His face full of delight, he raised his hand to make a crisp salute.

"Oh, you are from Korea, aren't you? From the country led by President Kim Il Sung."

He was hugely rejoiced, without tearing his eyes off the portrait badge on my chest.

"I'm pleased. Going to the harbour? I'll guide the way, sir."

He turned back and led me as if I were a distinguished guest visiting his country.

Expressing my gratitude I asked, "Am I not bothering you? You seemed to be going in the opposite direction—"

"Never mind. I can't tell how much pleased I am to meet with a Korean. I have longed to see a Korean. How I wished I could!" His tone of voice was rather excited. Briskly walking with me he added:

"I have long wanted to meet Koreans since I heard about the Hyoksin. Any seafarer sailing the Indian Ocean knows about the Hyoksin. Everybody longs for Korea. The Hyoksin is a name that imbues courage and confidence into the minds of us seafarers. The ship of Korea adorned the waters of the Indian Ocean with a legend of the 20th century. When they fall ill in the sea they are destined to die and when they die they can't but be buried in the

sea, and the Hyoksin gave a great impact on the seafarers. They pondered over the value of life...."

The naval officer had a heart as warm as the sun of his country. Walking abreast of him who spoke with a passionate tone of voice, I remembered what had happened several years ago: two crewmen of the Korean trade ship Hyoksin fell critically ill in the middle of the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean and they needed immediate surgical operations, which were impossible on board the ship severely shaken by high waves. Informed of their critical conditions Comrade Kim Jong Il architected nationwide actions to save their lives. Radio was the only means of communication between the Hyoksin and the homeland. There was little possibility of the two crewmen being rescued. But Comrade Kim Jong Il said that those who were in the homeland could not just sit with arms folded, and had a powerful medical group formed. This group received radio messages on the conditions of the patients and informed the ship staff of methods of treatment for the patients to prolong their lives until they arrived at the port of Madras for necessary surgical operations. This, indeed, was an unheard-of rescue operation. Through this operation the lives of the crewmen were saved miraculously.

The naval officer related this event while I felt unboundedly proud of my homeland where I was born and am living.

"Korea—Juche—We seafarers understand the word Juche as 'Long Live Man!' " declared the naval officer warmly, wielding his hand. At this moment I noticed the old man and his daughter stop and watch us with wide-eyed surprise. They both of them turned pale and could not tear their frozen eyes off me. Their eyes revealed a sort of fear rather than surprise.

On reaching the harbour I parted with the naval officer, when he produced his pocket-book and asked for my autography as a souvenir. I wrote down my plain name and position on the officer's pocket-book wrinkled by sea breezes; I was neither a renowned artist nor an athlete with world records but the naval officer respected me

solely because I was a Korean from Korea, the homeland of the Hyoksin.

The only overseas Koreans I had ever met abroad were the old man and his daughter whom I met for only one minute before I had the unforgettable meeting with the naval officer that day. Could the daughter of the old man be An Yun Ju? But it was impossible that the old man or his daughter should come to see me.

I treasured the indelible memory of the passionate naval officer of a newly-emerging independent country of luxuriant tropical forests, but the image of the old man and his daughter had long gone out of my mind like dust.

2

Unexpected things happen at times. An Yun Ju who was coming from Canada to see me was that very girl, the daughter of the old man with whom I had met on the road behind the botanical garden in the port city on the Indian Ocean.

I couldn't recognize her when she alighted from the plane. But she recognized me at the first glance and was delighted.

"You are Mr. Cho In Guk, aren't you?"

Only when I saw the glistening thin white necklace on her bare neck could I confirm that she was An Yun Ju and none other. This woman in refined Western clothes looked 24 or 25 already; she had grown up to be a calm, elegant woman.

That evening I strolled with her along the promenade on the Taedong River.

"I came to the homeland to apologize. Apologize to you, too.... This is my dead father's will...."

"Dead?!"

I stopped in my tracks.

"He is dead, sir," said An Yun Ju in an undertone, also stopping. Her white oval face in the light of a lamp on the promenade clouded over with deep sorrow. Tears gathered on the tender lashes of her downcast eyes.

"You mean your father died?"

"He did, sir. A month ago.... He had lived abroad all his life and was unable to return home...."

I had a heavy heart as I stared at her grief-stricken profile which caused me to speculate on some tragic circumstances.

What kind of man was her father? I wondered. Why did he die? He lived his life abroad even pretending to be ignorant of Korean. But, at the last moment of his life he asked his daughter to go to the homeland and apologize. How's that?

An Yun Ju was speechless for long moments apparently trying to repress sorrow and anguish gnawing at her heart.

Evening mist began to rise from the surface of the Taedong River. It rose slowly and meandered imperceptibly but before long it covered the surface of the water and the granite staircase on the riverbank.

With the damp mist came a close fishy smell from the water. Presently the mist filled the air over the flowing river as if rising over a valley and the long railing on Okryu Bridge festooned with light bulbs looked as if it was floating on clouds without piers underneath. The air was rather chilly.

"Let's go into the hotel and talk," I suggested. "Maybe you don't like the mist."

"How about you, sir? As for me... I would like to stay on here. This is the mist of the homeland...."

As An Yun Ju spoke, she stroked the long, slender willow branches which dangle like fishing lines.

I thought I understood her feeling and remained standing in silence. The mist had already covered everything. It was impossible to distinguish the water from the bank. The only thing that reminded us of where we were standing was the flaming torch above the Tower of the Juche Idea soaring across the sea of mist.

After a long while I asked softly, "Why did your father die so suddenly? He looked sturdy despite his age then."

"You must have been very much annoyed at that time. In order to explain why my father behaved that way and

why he died suddenly... I'll have to tell you about his life first. Then you'll understand everything."

An Yun Ju looked for some moments across at the torch dazzling above the milky sea of mist which, like a snowstorm, had shrouded the whole river and its shores, before she resumed.

"I'll try to make it short, sir. My father lived abroad for 63 years. Thousands of miles away from the homeland. You might criticize him as a deserter. But, please don't conclude too hastily. I am well aware that he was uncommonly patriotic.

"...I was told that he left the country when he was six. With my grandfather. My grandfather had been engaged in the patriotic enlightenment movement and the March First Movement. He exiled himself to escape from being arrested by the Japanese. He stayed in Shanghai for some time before going to France. My father attended primary school there. He often told me about his primary school days. About how he was ridiculed and insulted by foreign children whose language he didn't understand well.

"One day during the second term of the first year he attended a story-telling lesson at school. The pupils called by the teacher (a woman who became a famous writer later) stood at the teacher's table and told various interesting stories. Some pupils told fairy tales, others old tales and still others fictitious stories. The buoyant French boys were good at cracking jokes and their cheerful laughter filled the classroom all the time. Towards the end of the lesson the teacher called my father. He said he was taken aback but stood bravely at the teacher's table. The grandfather had strictly demanded that his son should never be cowardly in front of foreigners. Out of curiosity the pupils focused their bright eyes on the only foreign boy in their class. My father did stand at the teacher's table but he remained silent for a long time.

" 'Now, tell us a story. Never mind making mistakes.' The near-sighted woman with silver-rimmed spectacles looked smilingly at my father who was too nervous to speak. She wanted to know how much this foreign boy from the distant Orient had improved his French. Since

he had studied with French children my father spoke French quite fluently but he didn't know what story to tell then and there.

" 'Any story will do,' whispered the teacher encouragingly. My father couldn't speak out, however. He didn't know any French fairy tales or legends except those in the textbooks.

"Time passed by. His companion who used to sit next to him whispered sympathetically, 'Hey, tell a Korean story.'

"The teacher nodded her head. 'Oh, that would be fine. Tell us about Korea. You may tell a Korean story or let us know about Korean customs.'

"But my father knew no Korean stories, nor any Korean customs. Since he had left his country at the age of six he only remembered his home, the low pine timber behind the village and the vast expanse of sea spreading in front of the village.

" 'Doesn't your country have any old stories?'

An impatient boy asked in a deriding tone of voice. But my father couldn't reply.

" 'What mountains do you have in your country? Don't you have one like Mont Blanc?' queried another boy.

"My father couldn't answer.

" 'What rivers does your country have? Any river like the Seine?' some boy inquired.

"No answer came from my father. His memory of the homeland was as vague and sorrowful as the image of his mother who had died when he was a suckling child. He did not remember her face or voice. He could only recall the smell of her breast, which was soft and caressing to the touch. As for the homeland he only remembered the joy of building sand castles on the seashore, the chirping of invisible skylarks, the coarse yet tender hands of his mother who would pick him up and put him to bed when he was tired of playing and fell asleep where he was, and the pungent smell of the mosquito fire. This was the smell of his home village, a sense given him by the homeland, but it was difficult to express in a story those memories which had no definite form.

" 'Your country has neither river nor mountain?' some one called out.

"The classroom shook with laughter.

" 'Don't laugh,' remonstrated the teacher. But at the sight of my father standing speechless, the pupils couldn't suppress their laughter. He was biting his lip to stop himself from bursting into sobs. Then, there was another voice, asking, 'Is there a country named Korea?'

"To this question my father gave an immediate reply.

" 'There is!'

" 'Where is it? Find it. Find it on the world map over there. The part you pointed to the other day belongs to Japan. My brother said there is no such country as Korea.'

" 'There is!' shouted my father again.

" 'There isn't!'

" 'There is!'

" 'Prove it!'

"My father couldn't reply. Tears trickled down his cheeks. The teacher had been seated without a word. She had only wanted to check the speaking ability of the Asian boy. As she saw him crying, she rose to her feet in a hurry and asked the pupils to stop arguing.

" 'That's enough. This is a story-telling lesson. Not a geography lesson but a story-telling lesson.'

"This gentle-hearted teacher became a writer and wrote many good works, but in those days she was not in the least interested in the colour of Korea on the world map. As soon as the lesson was over, the French boys had completely forgotten about the debate, and they didn't harass my father any longer. But he didn't forget what had happened in the classroom that day.

"Five years later father graduated from the primary school. A day before the graduation ceremony my father visited the woman teacher alone. She was glad to see him.

" 'Oh, you've come, my boy. You are graduating tomorrow, eh? Congratulations!'

" 'Thank you, madame. I have something to suggest.'

" 'What about it? Go ahead and tell me.'

" 'Would you please arrange a story-telling lesson for our class?'

" 'A story-telling lesson? What for?'

"The short-sighted woman was perplexed. Over the silver-rimmed spectacles she looked vacantly at the stocky, stubborn-looking Asian boy.

" 'I...want to tell the story I couldn't tell my classmates at that time. Because once I graduate I won't have a chance....'

" 'What do you mean by the story you couldn't tell?'

"The teacher had clean forgotten the incident which had occurred five years ago.

" 'At that time, during the first story-telling lesson in the second term of the first year I couldn't tell about my country, about Korea as you and my classmates wanted me to.... I've prepared myself for it. I can do it now. I can tell my country exists;it's a very nice country....'

"Now, the teacher remembered. She looked at my father with a serious expression.

" 'You have not forgotten it?'

"The teacher realized that it was not just a matter of speaking ability; it was a matter of the boy's national pride, his patriotism rooted in his inmost heart.

" 'You mean you still remember it? It happened when you were in the first year, but you have engraved it in your memory for five years, until the graduation day?'

"The woman teacher was deeply moved. She looked musingly at my father not as a 12-year-old boy, but as if he was a delegate of a wronged Asian nation. Her eyes betrayed respect and sympathy. She stood up hurriedly.

" 'Let's have a story-telling lesson. I'll arrange it. Right away....'

"There was the lesson. My father stood at the teacher's table to face the whole class. He began his speech by saying that he was anxious to tell before graduation the story he couldn't tell at the first story-telling lesson during the second term of the first year. The information on the homeland my father had collected for five years was quite encyclopaedic for a primary school pupil's. It consisted of a systematic outline of Korean history from the period of Koguryo to modern times and a most interesting introduction of a brilliant national culture and soulful folklore.

Needless to say, my grandfather had given him much help in preparing this. In a couple of months after that story-telling lesson he had prepared himself to answer any possible questions his classmates would ask. But he was not satisfied and had worked tirelessly for five years to become thoroughly prepared to furnish perfect answers to any questions, to smash any attack.

"My father's story sounded like a degree paper, like the indignant defence of the wrongfully accused. His classmates were overwhelmed with emotion and listened with abated breath.

" 'Such is the Korean nation. Korea is such a country. Korea exists!'

"As he concluded his speech, cheers burst forth in the classroom. The pupils applauded enthusiastically.

"When he alighted from the platform his classmates surrounded him.

" 'I' m sorry. Forgive me.'

" 'We were little boys then. Forget about it!'

"They vied with each other to shake hands and apologize. At this moment a pupil who had seated in the last row mumbled: 'You've proved that Korea existed with historical data, but you've failed to prove that such a country really exists. It does not exist but existed; the verb should be in the past tense.'

"Instantly the classroom seemed to be frozen.

" 'At present in my country the Japs....'

"My father tried to add some words but failed to find proper ones to answer. Gripped by surging indignation he beat his chest but he couldn't give the answer. The whole Korean people had writhed and shed blood but had not been able to give that answer. Neither the Righteous Volunteers nor the Independence Army nor the March First Movement had been able to furnish that answer. How could a 12-year-old boy do so?

"My father's face turned white, his mouth fell open. He wanted to say something but couldn't. With a sorrowful expression he betrayed his sense of shame and despair. The classmates looked at him sympathetically. It was a tearful sight, indeed. The French boys dared not look at

him any longer and turned their faces away.

"There was an agonizing silence in the classroom. My father was still unable to answer. His lips moved from time to time but he couldn't utter a word. He looked so miserable.

"After a good while the pupils left their seats one by one and went out silently. Several minutes later the classroom was clear of all but my father whose feet were glued to the floor of the room, glistening tears streaming down his cheeks and the teacher remaining seated in the same posture by her table as she had taken at the beginning of

the lesson. She was looking forlornly at my father through her spectacles, her face upon her interlaced fingers. She was meditative. But it was beyond her power to offer him any helpful words. She was well aware that there was no word that could comfort him, that there was no word in the world that could soothe a boy who had no country of his own.

3

After primary school my father had to work to support himself through lycee because his father died. He continued to work part time to pay his way through medical college.

"After graduation he was employed in the department of surgery at the Bedrau Hospital. He was a highly skilled surgeon. Because of his diligence and innate ability, he was able to pass all his medical exams at the first attempt and became a consultant when he was still very young. He became a leading figure in the medical world. He was particularly well known for his chest operations. The Bedrau Hospital became a very prestigious hospital due to my father's services.

"Korea was liberated. My father was so overjoyed that he started packing to return home on the very day of liberation. The director of the hospital did all he could to dissuade my father from going back to Korea. He was well aware of the extent to which his hospital's reputation rested on that of Dr. An, my father. The Bedrau Hospital minus Dr. An would be like a fruit tree without fruit. The hospital director earnestly entreated my father to prolong his stay for another year with a promise that he would double his salary. As it was immediately after the Second World War, there were many wounded people in France who needed surgical treatment. Finally a compromise was reached. He would prolong his stay for six months. My father could not bring himself to return home at a time when there were so many patients in the hospital waiting to undergo surgical operations. Six months passed, but

still the hospital director was unwilling to release my father. It was not until the autumn of 1946, another six months later, that my father was able to return to the homeland. He arrived at Ryosu in south Korea, his home town, and got a job in a hospital. He worked with greater pleasure and vigour than ever as he was now treating his own compatriots. However, his delight and vigour did not last long in south Korea under American military occupation where their local lackeys were swaggering about. Soon afterwards he was cursing himself for ever having become a surgeon.

"After the outbreak of the October Popular Resistance (the popular uprising on October 1, 1946 against the US imperialist occupiers and their running dogs) my father was drafted to provide medical services to the policemen who had been injured while repressing the uprising. My father didn't understand what the October Popular Uprising was all about, but he hated the police who killed their compatriots in cold blood. He treated the wounded policemen conscientiously but there was hatred in his heart for them. The psychological torment of having to employ his skills for the benefit of bestial human beings who could massacre their fellow countrymen almost drove him mad. But somehow he managed to cope with it. Then he came across something that was beyond his endurance.

"One day he was ushered into a police station cell, where he found a political prisoner lying on the floor. The man was on the verge of death. He had received severe blows to his face and chest; he was unconscious, his ribs were all broken and his face was ripped. The police superintendent asked my father to administer first aid to him so as to enable him to speak. The man was a terrible sight. He was in such a state that it was obvious to my father that he wouldn't survive for more than a few hours unless he received a chest operation without delay. When my father explained this to him, the police superintendent sneered.

" 'Chest operation? Don't make me laugh,' he said. 'Put his distorted jaw in order and give him an injection. I want to know the whereabouts of his hideout, that's all.

I need him conscious for five or ten minutes. Then he must die!'

"My father was infuriated.

" 'This is a crime. A crime, I say! What are you doing in this liberated land?! I won't be a party to your criminal acts!'

"The police superintendent was thunderstruck by this unexpected resistance.

" 'What?! Which side are you on, you bastard?'

"Next moment the policeman's clenched fist struck my father in the face.

"That night he went down to the harbour without even a trunk and found passage on a smuggler's ship.

A month later he was back at the Bedrau Hospital. When he saw my father the lanky hospital director raised his hands and greeted him but not without trace of derision in his tone.

" 'We have got along somehow without you, Dr. An. But you could hardly work without the Bedrau Hospital. Surgery is performed not by the hands of a surgeon but by surgical instruments. Maybe Korea had no instruments suited to your hands. And don't expect you'll get the same amount of salary as before....'

"My proud father would not normally have stood for this sort of badinage, but he was too tired and disspirited to feel insulted.

"So he resumed his work at the Bedrau Hospital. He took up the same routine exactly as before. The smooth rubber gloves, the stifling odour of anesthetic, the glittering scalpels, the blood drawing a red line along the incision.... Everything was just the same as before. Except for one thing. That was my father's mood. He was utterly crestfallen.

"After his return from the homeland he was forlorn like a sick man. Before liberation he was tough and upright despite the hardships he had endured and the prejudice he encountered. He had been so proud and audacious that he would respond to the slightest insult with merciless retorts. But after his trip to the homeland, his pride and passion fizzled out and he was always aggrieved. In the

past he had always the hope of returning home so he had had passion and pride. He had such hope no longer. Without hope one falls into a state of lethargy. The homeland, his hope, was no more. In the very place which he had thought to be his homeland they had struck his cheek. He had no homeland. The place in his heart that had been occupied by the homeland was vacant. There was nothing that could fill that space.

"Materially, my father lived a secure and comfortable life. After a while the Director of the Bedrau Hospital raised his salary. Other hospitals invited my father to come and perform intricate operations. Medical colleges requested special lectures from him. However, material affluence and professional standing could not fill his spiritual void. He was always gloomy. His was the gloom of one who has nowhere to entrust his heart. It was the gloom of one who cannot see the worth of life.

"The hospital director felt sorry for my father because he was always oppressed with sorrow. He advised him to get married. My father was nearly 40 then but still single. He had had no opportunity to marry nor had there been a suitable partner available. He never entertained the thought of marrying a foreign woman.

"A year later, having received a letter from my father, a Korean nurse came to France; she had helped him while he was in Ryosu. (This nurse is my mother.) But even getting married was not enough to revitalize him. He often fell ill. He became gradually emaciated and his eyes became lacklustre.

"My mother urged him to take a change of air. So he moved to Switzerland and subsequently lived in Holland and Tunisia, too. As a renowned surgeon, my father received invitations from many countries. Several years ago he took up residence in Canada.

"On our way to Canada aboard a liner, we heard the news about the holocaust in Kwangju (in May 1980). At the instigation of the US imperialists, the Chun Doo Hwanites massacred people in the south Korean city of Kwangju. I felt as if I could hear over the waves of the Atlantic the agonizing cries of thous-

ands of students and citizens of Kwangju who were stabbed by bayonets and swords. Kumnam Street covered with corpses, the graveyard on Mt. Mudung, blood, blood.... I couldn't shake off the delusion that their blood surged and mingled in the waves of the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean we were crossing. I felt as if the water foaming at the bow was red blood. Everyone on the liner was talking about the reports on the bloodshed in Kwangju.

"My father was deeply agitated and deadly tired. He regarded the Kwangju massacre as a national disgrace.

" 'How is it possible that such a thing can happen in our country?'

"We were watching a TV screen which showed blood-stained students being dragged away, their wrists and ankles tied with wires, like bundles of fish. A European with his eyes averted downwards whispered to my father, 'Excuse me, but you are from that country, aren't you?' His tone of voice was so soft that I could hardly tell whether he was implying sympathy or ridicule.

"My father got angry and snapped at him, saying, 'I don't know anything about that country.'

"As soon as we returned to our cabin my father locked the door. He gravely warned us not to go out to the recreation rooms or on to the deck. Mother and I had no desire to go there anyway because we were ashamed to meet the other passengers.

"On our arrival in Canada my father didn't identify himself as a Korean.

" 'Who would want to be treated by someone from south Korea where they thrust swords into the abdomens of pregnant women?' "

4

"Even in Canada my father's mood did not change and his health continued to deteriorate. On the other hand, he achieved tremendous success as a surgeon because he dedicated himself to his work completely in an endeavour

to forget everything else. He wrote a number of books on surgery. Some of his articles in the medical journals caused quite a stir. He received invitations from many institutions and hospitals not only in Canada but also in Europe and even in South America. That time when we met you, my father was on his way back from a Middle East emirate to which he had been invited. He used to take me with him on long journeys. We had dropped in at that port town to do some sightseeing. It was there at that port town that my father pondered again over the homeland. For the first time in his life he heard a foreigner talking about Korea with such delight and regard that he was surprised beyond measure. He didn't even look straight at you because he thought you must be a south Korean diplomat. He saw the naval officer give you a military salute and with such overflowing joy say that he had been longing to meet Koreans. Then my father realized that he had only known about half of Korea.

"We waited by the roadside and met the naval officer on his way back from guiding you to your destination. And we came to know why he had longed for Korea so much and about the episode of the trade ship, Hyoksin, which had moved the seamen who cross the Indian Ocean so deeply. (I copied your name from the naval officer's pocketbook.)

"As to the episode of the Hyoksin, my father could hardly believe it and asked the same questions again and again.

" 'Were the patients ordinary ship's crew? Weren't they high-ranking officials? Were they plain seamen really?'

"Because my father was so suspicious, he kept repeating the same questions and this finally irritated the naval officer.

" 'Who are you? You too look like Koreans.... If you can't believe it, go and visit the hospital in Madras. The port of Madras is not so far from here. Go and visit it.'

" 'I would have to go and see even if it were far away,' My father whispered to me. 'I must confirm the fact for myself. If it's true this really is fantastic. Nobody under-

stands what this means more than I.'

"We called at the port of Madras. At the Madras hospital he was told about everything. He was so profoundly moved that on his way back, he declared, 'She exists, she does exist. She does!'

"I was perplexed. 'What do you mean, father?'

" 'I mean the motherland exists. Motherland.... Motherland... Korea.... There is a homeland that we can boast about to the whole world.' He was so delighted that tears brimmed in his eyes. He was in such an ecstasy of joy that he repeated his declaration.

" 'Why, she exists. Why shouldn't we have our homeland? Just as there is no child without a mother, so there is no one who has no homeland. We have a great homeland.... But I never knew about it until now....'

"He looked like a patient who has just come round from an anesthetic. He opened his eyes wide as if to look at the world in a fresh light. He stared into the sky, looked across at the sea and lifted his head to look up at the sun.

" 'Why didn't I know about this?' lamented my father repeatedly.

" 'I didn't know.... I was blind....'

"My father had lived in the Western world all his life, and he had had no clear conception about north Korea. A vague prejudice and fear of communism had built a wall around his view.

"On his way back to Canada he visited France. I asked him why he was visiting this country.

" 'I've got to hold a reunion.'

" 'Reunion?'

" 'I must call all the primary school graduates and tell them the story which I failed to tell then.'

" 'What do you mean by the story you failed to tell?'

" 'I told you about it before. At the first story-telling lesson during the second term of the first year of the primary school I was struck dumb and cried. At the time of graduation I tried to make up for my failure but I was put to shame again. I must tell my old boys about the episode of the Hyoksin. I must tell them not about the

past of Korea but about her present. The Hyoksin is a prism that reflects the present of Korea.' His voice betrayed his excitement.

" 'Just as a tiny prism clarifies the essence of the sunrays flooding the universe, so the Hyoksin clarifies what kind of country Korea is.'

"On board the liner bound for France he sent telegrams to all the old boys from his primary school. Two weeks later a reunion was held in Paris. There were 32 old primary school boys. All of them had greying hair. Everybody was present except for six who had died. Those who had moved to the provinces came to the capital by air. They all had different occupations. Among them were a National Assemblyman and a lycee principal. There were also printers, a hotel manager, a film director and a grocery shop owner. The old people embraced each other warmly and were overjoyed like young boys. It was quite a moving sight. And I was pleasantly surprised to notice their teacher there too. She was 74 years old now, her hair snow-white. She brought with her a collection of her works for me. She had a bad heart and found it difficult to get her breath. But she held me tightly on a sofa and listened to my father's speech. Her eyes brimming with tears, she whispered to me.

" 'This is no reunion, but the third story-telling lesson.... I admire your father's stubbornness. That persistence is born out of his pride in his homeland.... Your father must be 63 but he still has the passion he had at the age of 12.'

" 'He was sick until recently, though.'

" 'Was he? But he doesn't look like a man who has been ill.... Look at him. Making a fiery speech just like a young man. Roaring like a lion, so to say...'

"In fact, ever since his visit to Madras he has been full of vigour as if he has recovered his youth. Like a patient who has entered a period of recuperation after a serious illness, his spirits soared as the days went by and his passion surged. Madras was a turning point in his life.

"That night I told my father. 'The reunion was a

great success, father. Are you satisfied now?' But he shook his head.

" 'No. I'm not satisfied only with the reunion. I'll give a lecture. I will. I'll speak about the Korea of today, about the contribution Korea has made to the modern medical world. About the example she has set to the civilized world. This kind of story ought to be told and retold endlessly.'

"He gave lectures at a number of places. Wherever he was invited, he gave lectures after he had performed his surgical operations. The lectures would be attended by my father's colleagues and their families, scholars who had read his articles in the journals and medical students. The contents of the lectures were steadily enriched. My father devoured foreign language editions of various publications issued by the DPRK through which he came to know that free medical care is given in the homeland; that People's Army planes were mobilized to rescue a young fisherwoman from a disaster; that a school was built specially for three little pupils on a lone lighthouse islet; and that in order to save the life of a worker suffering from burns, hundreds of people donated pieces of their skin. Such facts as these couldn't even be dreamed of in the Western world. And all these instances were included in his lectures. My father would always conclude his lectures by saying, 'This is Korea.' He declared to the whole world the perfect answer to the question raised by his classmates during his first year at primary school.

"The homeland struck her roots in his heart through the Hyoksin. She brightly shone in his heart like the morning sun soaring over the blue oceanic waves. In this way my father embraced the motherland, the motherland of Juche without which he could live no longer, the homeland which rinsed out the insults he had experienced in the cursed home town in south Korea and all the sorrows he had endured in far-off alien lands.

"At this time my father was preparing to return home.

" 'I must go back,' he would say, 'to the homeland and apologize. If the homeland will forgive me, then I

must do something to help my compatriots from now on.'

"He had put his theses and papers published over many years in order and had begun to sum up his clinical experiences. But my father because of his decision had attracted the attention of certain parties.

"This is how it happened. My father had been invited to a port town on the Gulf of St. Laurence to perform a heart operation (the patient was the mayor of the town). After the operation my father planned to give a lecture on the following day. He went out to reserve a hall in which to hold the lecture. While I was left alone at the hotel, two Korean strangers came to see me. Both of them wore dark sunglasses. One of them was a lanky fellow like a mantis, and wore a suit and a blue felt hat. His grey tie had a writhing cobra embroidered on it. The other one sported a black leather jacket and a leather cap pulled down to his eyebrows. He had a stumpy neck like a circus clown's. Looking furtively around the room, one of them asked me.

" 'You Dr. An's daughter, miss?'

" 'What do you want? Where are you from?'

" 'We have to find out something.'

" 'What? Go ahead and ask me, please.'

" 'Ask your father if he's tired of breathing.'

" 'What?!'

"I was too flabbergasted and infuriated to utter a word. The man in the blue felt hat stood arrogantly right in front of me. 'Tell him to stop making communist propaganda if he wants to carry living', he hissed at me. 'Tell him just to behave like a doctor and stop causing a fuss.'

"The man in the leather jacket sat on the teatable and added: 'A passenger ship is sailing for Montreal tomorrow at 2 p.m. You'd better be on that boat. If not, you might not be able to return ever.... Understand?'

" 'Just think', added the other man. 'If your father died, what would become of you? It's obvious. You'd have to make a living on the street.'

" 'You might get a job in some gay quarters in Montreal. Hu, hu, hu.'

"I intuitively realized that they were CIA agents sent from south Korea.

"My father returned to the hotel in the evening. He looked pleased with himself. 'I've reserved the city theatre,' he said. 'Through the good offices of the mayor's wife. It has 2,000 seats, they say. Isn't that grand? At first I thought I would only have a permission to use the 500-seat auditorium at the medical college.... What's wrong with you?'

"He had been telling me this while removing his overcoat which I took from him and hung on a rack. When he caught sight of me, he was stunned at the deathly pallor of my face.

" 'Are you ill?'

"I could not suppress the hot tears that welled in my eyes.

" 'Has something happened?'

"I told him about the visit from the two fellows in the dark sunglasses. I proposed that we leave by train that very night. (Although they had told us to leave on the passenger ship I wanted to go by train as a sort of gesture of defiance.)

" 'We can take the 9:20 pm train. Let's leave right after supper.'

" 'Leave?!' My father stared at me, wide-eyed. 'There will be an audience of 2,000 at seven tomorrow evening,' he said. 'You think we should ask these 2,000 people not to come because we are afraid of those two guys? Come on, let's go eat supper.'

"We went down to the dining hall, but I couldn't eat. I was haunted by the fear that the man in the blue felt hat and his companion in the leather cap might suddenly appear from nowhere and make further provocations. Who could tell? My father ate his supper with composure. He even ate more than usual. I realized that he was not unusually hungry but that he did so deliberately to try to put me at ease. That night I couldn't sleep a wink.

" 'If you don't return on that boat....' I could not get these words out of my mind or the images of the blue felt hat and cobra tie and the insidious grin beneath the

leather cap and dark glasses. I made up my mind that in the morning I would persuade my father to leave on the 2 o'clock ship. But when morning came, I kept studying his face but I dared not do so. I knew what he was like. Finally I suggested: 'How about informing the police about this? You never can tell what outrage they might perpetrate at the lecture this evening.'

"He was seated on the sofa reading a French edition of the Korea Today magazine with the help of his reading glasses. He looked at me over the rims of his glasses and scoffed.

" 'Didn't I tell you yesterday that there will be 2,000 people? They will be ready to protect me from the two uninvited guests.'

" 'And yet— who knows what they might do? Once we report it to the police we'll feel easier, won't we?'

" 'What should I tell them? That there might be terrorism? If such a rumour spreads, no one will come to attend the lecture. Everybody will be scared. I might just as well cancel it.'

"There was nothing more I could say. My father repeatedly assured me that nothing would happen.

" 'They just threatened us. They think I'll be scared and back down. What kind of thing could they possibly do?'

"But I couldn't forget the blue felt hat, the cobra on the tie darting out its tongue and the thug in the leather cap who resembled a circus clown. I was on pins and needles. I did not know what to do with myself that day. I kept looking at my watch again and again.

"It was a serene early spring day. The climate in that part of the country was cold. Sometimes there would be snowflakes flying about even in spring. But that particular day was warm. The hotel where my father and I were staying was well heated and a haze of warm steam was rising up the window through which I could see the dark violet blue water of the Gulf of St. Laurence. As the winter was over the surface of the sea glistened dazzlingly in the sun. The waves rippled. It was as if peace and tranquility reigned over everything under the sun. It was so quiet and peaceful that day. I turned my eyes towards the harbour

where I could see the white hull of the luxury passenger ship SS St. Laurence anchored at a wharf. The day before the thugs had ordered us to leave on that boat. I looked at my watch. It was exactly one o'clock. The boat was due to leave at 2. If we were to get on board, we were supposed to go and buy tickets now.

"I was agitated as if I was at crossroads, uncertain which direction to take. I looked across at my father. He was still absorbed in reading Korea Today. From time to time he nodded his head or smiled, stroking his bald forehead in a gesture of delight. He looked just like a little boy devouring an interesting fairy tale. In order to stop him reading I softly told him it was lunchtime. He lifted his head.

" 'You want to take lunch already? Oh, you must be hungry because you did not eat much breakfast.'

"He immediately rose to his feet. He loved me so dearly. Even at the table I kept looking at him, instead of eating.

" 'Why don't you eat?'

" 'Father...,' I began falteringly.

" 'What?'

" 'Let's go to the harbour right away.'

" 'What are you talking about?'

" 'The passenger ship St. Laurence leaves at exactly 1400 hours. We can still catch it if we leave now.'

"Only then did my father understand what I meant. He glared at me angrily.

" 'How cowardly....'

"He didn't complete the sentence. Am I overreacting? I asked myself. They might have left this town after the browbeating.... It could just be a threat....

"I tried hard to view things optimistically, but my heart remained as heavy as lead. The cobra's tongue kept darting in and out before my eyes. My premonition was not unfounded. I took a short stroll along the seashore with my father. When we returned to the hotel and entered our room, my blood ran cold because lying there on the teatable were two green tickets. They were first-class cabin reservations for the SS St. Laurence. This was the

cobra's final warning implying that we had been given the tickets and we had to go. Those fellows hadn't gone away but had continued to shadow us. They had thought nothing of intruding into a locked room. At the sight of the tickets my father smiled a forlorn smile.

" 'How tenacious they are, those mean bastards....'

"I feared lest the thugs were hiding somewhere in the room and about to pounce on us. I was about to propose to my father that we leave while there was still time. It would only have taken us five minutes to get to the harbour. Before I had a chance to speak, my father had torn up the tickets. He crumpled the pieces and threw them in the ashtray.

" 'Their importunate behaviour proves that my lecture is by no means worthless. They are obviously scared out of their wits. They have....'

"My father said this proudly and with a smile. But he could not entirely conceal his anxiety. For quite a long time he just stood there in the room in silence.

"I watched him and in another bid to persuade him I opened my lips.

" 'Father, to my mind....'

" 'Don't say any more.... I'll never back down from this worthy cause.'

"His decision was firm. A heavy silence prevailed. All of a sudden there came the prolonged wail of a siren. The St. Laurence was setting sail. It sounded like the call of a lone wolf on the ice or the whistle arousing a cobra concealed in a bag. I felt as if the sound of the siren was foretelling some doom that was awaiting us. My father remained as calm as ever. It seemed as if he didn't even hear the sound of the ship's siren.

At 6:30 a car came for my father from the city theatre. As we came out of the hotel my father said to me in a calm, persuasive but unusually strict tone of voice.

" 'Don't tell anybody about the blue felt-hatted gentleman or the ship reservations. If that got out, the audience would be distracted and they might disperse....'

I respected my father's advice. I decided that I would say nothing until the lecture was over, but as soon as it

was finished, I would inform the mayor's wife about what had been happening and ask her to have appropriate measures taken to protect my father from possible assault. This proved to be an irretrievable blunder on my part.

"The lecture was a great success. In those days a heart operation was still quite a rarity, so my father's reputation had drawn many doctors, scholars, students and intellectuals not only from the town but also from other places in the region. Approximately ten minutes after the lecture had started I went out to the rostrum, as usual, carrying a teapot. As I placed it on a corner of the top of the rostrum within my father's reach I glimpsed a piece of white paper the size of a postcard. On it were some words written in crude handwriting which took my breath away. I felt so dizzy that I almost cried out. I tried to pick up the piece of paper. My father noticed this and immediately pressed his hand over it. He whispered remonstratively.

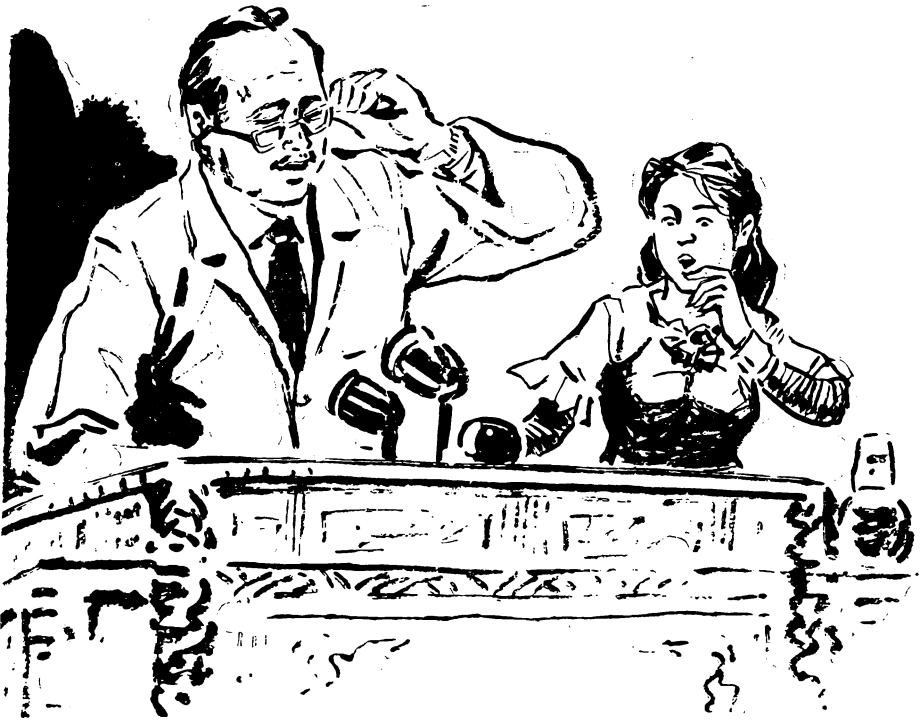
" 'Be quiet. This is a mere threat.'

"The slip of paper read: 'Dr. An, Get off. There is a time bomb in the rostrum!'

"To this day I am at a loss to understand how I suppressed the impulse to jerk my father's hand without an instant's hesitation and pull him away from the rostrum, how I turned on my heels calmly to walk back to the waiting room. It seems that I could have such will-power because my father had given me such strict instructions not to cause a disturbance in the lecture hall and because I considered that such an impulsive action on my part would create a shameful impression in front of the two thousand people.

"In a state bordering an unconsciousness, I barely made it to the waiting room. No sooner had I reached it than I ran to the telephone to inform the city police authorities. I took up the receiver with a trembling hand and hastily turned the dial, but I just didn't know what to do. This is wasting time, I told myself. I must not lose time. I must get my father down from that rostrum. Shouldn't I ring the emergency alarm bell?

"In a few moments the situation might become irre-



trievable. At the same time I could see my father's fixed eyes which looked remonstrative. They seemed to say: 'This is a mere threat. Don't make a fuss. It will ruin the lecture.'

"And what if the slip of paper was only a threat? I asked myself. What if no time bomb was found under the rostrum after the commotion caused by the emergency alarm bell? Then my father and his lecture would be a laughingstock.

"It is unlikely that the thugs have placed a time bomb there, I tried to convince myself. Yes, the piece of paper may well be just a threat. Had they placed a real bomb,

they would not have put that slip of paper there. That is why my father is carrying on with his lecture.

"I settled on calling the city police on the phone. I asked them to come to the city theatre. As soon as they come, I thought, I will meet them. I will explain everything to them. I hurried out of the front door of the theatre to await their arrival.

"Before the police motorcycles had had time to arrive, the very thing which I had considered incredible, impossible, happened. The moment I stepped out of the front door an explosion shook the theatre. I darted back inside the building. The whole audience were on their feet and raising a loud cry. Those who had been seated in the front row rushed to the platform and held up my father who was lying underneath the rostrum. He pushed them away. He succeeded in raising his upper body. He took the microphone with his outstretched hand and held it to his mouth. His hand that gripped the microphone and his face were coverd in blood. He shouted some words into the microphone but his voice did not resound. His face had received such fearful injuries that he could hardly speak. Still he tried again to make some earnest declaration before he said 'Truth.... like the sun...' and collapsed, the microphone in his hand. With a wail of distress I rushed up to him and took him in my arms. He opened his eyes once more. He recognized me and again tried to say something but the words would not come out. Such a ghastly and tearful sight.... He gripped my hand with all the strength he could find and looked into my eyes. Then he managed to speak in a faltering whisper.

" 'I've understood the homeland before I go.... The homeland.... my country exalted by President Kim Il Sung....'

"At that moment I thought I saw a spark of joy in his fading eyes. It might have been a spark of bliss. Or a spark of ecstatic delight. His pride in his homeland gladdened him even at the last moment of his life. When he didn't know about his country, he didn't feel as if he was properly alive. But his pride in the homeland made him feel happy even on the brink of death.

"My father died. Everyone who had attended the lecture was either a doctor or a medical student but they were unable to save his life. The shrapnel had inflicted such serious wounds all over his body that he was beyond medical help. He died then and there before he could be removed to hospital. He died beside the rostrum where he had been proudly expounding on his homeland which he had too belatedly come to understand and what this homeland was showing to the world and humanity...."

An Yun Ju's story was over. I was rooted to the spot where I had been standing, wrapped in deep emotion. I had a vivid image of the old man, short yet sturdy, standing upright, full of pride. He was an unhappy, happy man who had lived far away from the homeland all his life and yet understood how dear it was more deeply than anybody else, and finally ended his life harbouring unbounded pride and confidence in his country.

* * *

An Yun Ju left Pyongyang a month later. I accompanied her to the airport to see her off. I asked her why she was leaving the homeland. She replied: "There are many overseas Koreans who are in the same sceptical frame of mind as my father and I were before we went over to Madras. I must let them know what I saw and how I felt in the homeland. Giving lectures also, like my father...."

Smiling brightly she clasped my hand with her small hand in a gleaming bracelet before she boarded the plane.

Translated by Kim Yong Mun

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